Appalshop's Media Institute • Country Cool • Illustrator Paul Brett Johnson

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

THE CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
Volume 20, Number 1

Raised Up in the Mountains:
The Youth of Appalachia

East Kentucky Childhood 1916

I was born on Cutshin. The house
Mama and Papa had built was of logs
laced together like a giant's fingers.
Outside, the creek slid through to the other world.

When I was born Clarence was two.
The devil had already marked him.
Where he fell into the grate
a fiery paw burnt into his cheek.

They was all the time being birthed.
When Don was born the midwife's girl
and me, we picked up little sticks
of wood. Each one of them was a baby.

When Sherman was being born
outside was like a light green smile.
The door opened and closed opened and closed.
Seemed like letting questions in and out.

When Dora was born, Dorey Creech
was the midwife for Mama. She brought
some red-and-white striped flour sacking
to make her first dress out of.

We had a little corn field above the barn.
Just after I was four years old
I took Sherman on my hip, carried him
past the big sow grunting in her black mud

past the brown and red banties
flashing in and out of the sun
and into the tall crowds of stalks
swaying to let us through

to where Mama was picking corn,
and there she took Sherman, sat on the ground
and nursed him like a picture
I once saw of the baby Jesus.

Little as we were, we went all over
looking for where the creeks go,
for the whippoorwills, the tree frogs,
the crickets, the redbird.

We thought they were the Lord
telling us things.
We went across the big mountain
and over down in another mountain

to a big coal bank. We hollered
and something twisted our words and
threw it back at us
in the hairy voice of the devil.

We went to church on the back of a mule.
When the mule started through the creek
it looked like something was about to
sweep us to a different place.

It has been that way ever since
that something was about to sweep me
into a different place. Perhaps to find
out if the whippoorwill is the Lord talking.

—Noel Smith

Noel Smith, a native of New York City, worked for the Frontier Nursing Service in Eastern Kentucky. Once having taken a gulp of the Kentucky River while swimming, she never got it out of her veins. She taught elementary school in New York's lower Hudson River Valley, where she now lives in blissful, busy retirement with her husband and three cats.

Cover photograph taken at the Appalachian Fair in Gray, Tenn., by Mike Smith. Layout by Hillhouse Graphic Design, Kingsport, Tenn.

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"If I could get the scene just right,
I could make my own history,
tear pages from a notebook and
begin my wanderings."
—**Corinna Byer**

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Strange Times

What a strange time it is to be working on an issue about Appalachian youth. Well, I suppose it's really just a strange and chaotic time to be working on anything — period.

It all made sense back when we were mapping out this stretch of themes. We'd take a backwards glance at those who have gone before with the Paying Tribute issue, suitably published in the somber days of winter, and then use the spring issue to look ahead to the region's future by focusing on the Youth of Appalachia.

Little did we imagine a future where so many of our young people would be marching across the sands of Iraq toward Baghdad as we put this issue to bed. I came of age during Vietnam, and I had young and somewhat frightened children at the time of the 1991 Gulf War. This time around, I'm finding it more wrenching. Even though I do not have any loved ones serving in the military, I'm finding looking at the photographs of soldiers almost impossible. As the mother of a 19-year-old daughter and twin 16-year-old sons, it's all too easy to look past the camouflage and the weapons and see how very young those faces under the helmets are. They look like my children's friends.

But in some ways, it's been a good time to work on this issue. In his essay, "Country Cool" (p. 3), retired Marshall University professor Danny Fulks characterizes his former students as down-to-earth individuals who look at life with clarity, think for themselves, and never lose their appreciation for the absurd. Both Christine Goldbeck in "Going Underground" (p. 24) and Liz McGeachy in "Creating It Yourself: Appalshop's Appalachian Media Institute" (p. 15) remind us how the young's curiosity (and, in the case of the 20-somethings exploring abandoned Pennsylvania coal mines, a very firm belief in their own immortality) inspire them to explore new territory. The profile of illustrator and writer Paul Brett Johnson by Marianne Worthington, "Reaching Kids Where They Live" (p. 31), shows how it is possible to keep the child in you alive. Johnson never lets being an adult get in the way of his telling (and illustrating) a good story from a young person's perspective.

And I must admit that my own spirits were lifted as I did the interviews for the story, "Transforming Lives" (p. 7). Here is an inspiring group of people tackling an important problem, the relatively low college-going rate found in some parts of Appalachia. Individuals such as guidance counselor Pat Cadle and administrators Wayne White and Sarita Gattuso — all raised in Appalachia — know exactly what it is like to be a young person in the region who is not entirely convinced that higher education is for them. But with creativity and commitment, all of those implementing the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education model approach to the problem are offering students a chance to make informed choices about their futures.

Appalachian youth, as reflected in these pages, is not a time free of pain. In Barbara Smith's story, "Mirrors" (p. 19), a young girl is just beginning to emerge from a bewildering sense of confusion about who she is. Michael Chitwood's "Hungry Mother" (p. 28) tells the all-too-common tale of a young boy trying to parent his devastated mother.

So, as it turns out, it is good this spring to be reminded that youth can be a time of energy, hope, adventure, and possibility. It is a time of life when the fact that nothing is certain doesn't always seem like such a bad thing. In these days when nothing seems sure, it is good to remember that uncertainty is not always the prelude to disaster. Sometimes it can be the first step in a voyage of discovery.

— Jane Harris Woodside, Editor

Raising the Nap

Spiny, rock-hard pod, seed spent,
the teasel, that early blooming
roadside attraction, brief spring blush,
peaks early, stands hardened,
thorny to lush summertime.

Medieval weavers and fullers
employed the teasel to fluff
and finish, raise the nap,
render the wool chillproof,
watershedding, impenetrable.

My father was my teasel.
His early beauty casually spent,
to our public shame,
we shared him with many.

I became tightly wrapped,
chillproof, acid-shedding,
impenetrable. His venom
and fists rolled away.
I was fulled and teaseled,
nap raised against the elements.

— Jane Hicks

Jane Hicks is a teacher of intellectually gifted students in Sullivan County, Tenn. She is a fiber artist who is presently designing a wall quilt for Silas House's new book, Parchment of Leaves. *Hicks has won prizes for both quilting and poetry and has published widely in the region.*

Only Child

Her perfect day
is waking up to birdsong
through treehouse slats,
then getting out watercolors
and splashing the day with hues
of Appalachian mountains.
She writes stories (girl with horse),
imagination bending
like the willow tree. Happiness
is watching a bee extract nectar
from inside a morning glory, or
feeling how within the heat of thicket,
honeysuckle comes into its own.
She observes sun lengthening
the day with shadow, moon
shaving fuzzy edges off the sun.

She breakfasts with Robinson Caruso,
lunches with Alice in Wonderland,
sups with the Queen of the May.
Her parents think she's lonely.

— Linda Brown

Linda Brown was born in Mt. Sterling, Ky., and for 11 years was a songwriter in Nashville. Her poetry has appeared in Creative Woman, Poetry Peddler, Bloodroot, Wind, Appalachian Heritage, *and* Parting Gifts.

Country Cool

by Danny Fulks

A retired West Virginia professor fondly remembers how his students' dry wit and talent for irony helped them cope with whatever life tossed at them.

They came down from little West Virginia towns like Madison, Red Jacket, Lenore, Crum, and West Hamlin. Girls — late of lands where slivers of coal left on the banks of runs flickered in the sun — packed hair dryers, low-rise jeans, and music by J. Lo, Alison Krauss, and Limp Bizkit; hit the crooked two-lanes; and left out for Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va. Some had tattoos — half-covered by jeans or tops — ears and eyebrows and an occasional tongue pierced. Others styled-out with short hair, wire-rimmed glasses, cell phones on their ears, and, close up, smelled as sweet as a fresh dryer sheet from momma's laundry room. After twelve years under lock-down in schools where principals in polyester sport coats kept them under surveillance, they were ready to let go. Country cool.

Older students dragged them around campus: Here's the library, here's the student center, here's the science building, inside there — financial aid. The campus Christian Center offered doughnuts and pop and invited everyone to Wednesday night's mix. When classes began for the students who had picked education for a major, there were few boys around. And those who did show up did not have given names like Strobe, McGeorge, Tweed, Staige, or Gutson. Appalachian parents, not dumb, went with Johns, Michaels, and Chrises — all lovers of pickup trucks, none showing signs of Eastern snobbery. Good boys — but not a Jack Kerouac aficionado in the bunch.

Most Appalachians have a dry wit, a sense of humor that leans towards the absurd. It is dark, gritty, and intimate; it makes fun of self, a form of low irony. They must have it, or they would not survive sad songs, stark sermons of small-town preachers, worry their parents and grandparents showed, and grim funeral services held for friends killed in car wrecks. The young kids' sense of irony and humor were, however, held back. September heat would pass from the campus before kids from Marrowbone (pronounced "Marbone") Creek, kids who were looking to fit in, would let on that they were any different from the few students who hailed from New York or Ohio.

Appalachian students felt out the professors. Does he care about me as a person? Can I trust him? Will he put me down if I pronounce *our* as "air"*? Flower* as "flar"? Can I say I "packed something" instead of "carrying it"? Will he tease me in a caring way? When he looks me in the eye, do I have to look away first? What do students who have been in his classes say about him? Mom knows somebody down in Welch who had him.

These were smart kids, smart not only in their books, but they were also whatever country lingo is for *street smart.*

These were smart kids, smart

not only in their books, but they were also whatever country lingo is for *street smart*. They'd never heard of a quid pro quo — I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine — but they knew how to use it. "I'm good to you. I expect you to be good to me." If the professor gave up the old B.F. Skinner principles of behaviorism and practiced the Minnie Pearl philosophy — "If you love them, they'll love you back" — for two or three weeks, warmth would break out, laughter would come, kids would talk. "Are you saying I can talk to you same as a friend? I've never heard of *that* before."

> "Just let us get to know you," I said. "This is a language class, so let's do some language."

So you asked a girl from Montgomery in Fayette County whether she ever went to the Mystery Hole, a place along West Virginia State Route 60 where, for a couple of bucks, you can see half a Volkswagen beetle and a run-down room put together to make visitors think the area is slanted ten degrees. She, reading my eyes and grin, laughed with me, knowing I was not making light of her hometown but letting her know I had been up there and would be willing to be a friend. It's like a guy offering someone a cigarette as a gesture of friendship: He's not going to come right out and say, "I like you."

I asked the students in reading class to form small groups, to sit with whomever they liked, and I went around to each, trying to get them to think about getting up in front of the class, to talk, to tell a story. "Just let us get to know you," I said. "This is a language class, so let's do some language. You guys have listened to teachers talk for twelve years. Take a turn for yourselves. We're not exploring quantum theories or teaching you to fly a plane. Just get up and talk.

"We'll find out about your grammar, voice, mannerisms, eye contact, and whether others will want to hear what you have to say. Are you OK with having standard grammar pointed out to you in private but not held against you for grades?" Most were. "We'll write some of it up, too, and check that out."

Kristin said she went to the Wild Dog Saloon, saw the David Allan Coe show, got there late after the joint's bartenders had sold as much beer as they could. To save money, she had a few beers and a wine cooler before she went, not starting out before 10 p.m. Coe looked weird, tattooed all over, sang "Mona Lisa Lost Her Smile."

Courtesy of Danny Fulks

Years of teaching have given Danny Fulks insight into his West Virginia students. Fulks (center) describes seniors (l to r) Tracy Hoskins, Stephanie Lineberry, Cynthia Dempsey, and Annalisa Nuckles as "charming, intelligent, funny, warm, easy lovers of the children they would teach." One student went west and the others to North Carolina for jobs as teachers after graduating in 1998.

I went, "Tell us some more."

"He sang 'If You Don't Like Hank Williams, You Can Kiss My Ass.'" Came off as natural as if she had said "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain." I felt good about the class, looked like it might work. In a setting where she feared being judged, Kristin might not have used the word *ass,* considered vulgar in some settings. Here no student rolled an eye nor dropped a jaw. Kristin had caught on: The class was hip. No one in the class needed to wonder if they were off-subject or if they could speak as though in a dorm room.

Michelle's roommate invited her boyfriend to sleep over at the house pretty often. He didn't pay no rent, took up bathroom time, and the sounds of lovemaking annoyed Michelle. Her solution to this Dr. Phil problem? Walk around in her underwear in front of the guy. Next thing you know, the roommate has moved over to the boyfriend's house. The students and I wrinkled our noses, agreed Michelle had avoided trouble in a cool way, had used the irony of surprise, even shock to her advantage. A few said they might even try it themselves.

Nicki and a friend went across the river to Ohio, left to go out just before midnight, hung around a few bars, drank some beer, partied with friends, got in her car to drive home. Three in the morning, and a black-and-white closed in, bubble gum machine blinking. Point zero eight over there — and you're in for

a hassle. The trooper gave her the routine—finger to nose, walk a line—and noticed glassy eyes. Nicki spent the night in jail with some women she insisted on calling sluts. I go, "Now, now, now Nicki, maybe we would just call them frisky." She swore they were sluts. It was the worst night of her life, she would never drink and drive again, might stay in her apartment for the rest of the term. Students listened to her story, asked for more details, and were not put off by her behavior. I asked if she would like me to check out who might be a good lawyer. Nicki finally pleaded guilty to reckless driving, and, the last I heard, was doing well in sales for a major mall chain store. No self-pity for Nicki.

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Trying to get students to think about the value of bringing bizarre objects into elementary classrooms for kids to look at, I suggested that these future teachers practice on all of us by showing things that might get our attention. Jeannette picked right up on the idea. While in Canada on her summer vacation, she bought a pack of Canadian cigarettes, brought them home. She showed the unopened pack, along with a variety of objects that might get the students and me involved, talking. When she showed the smokes, talked about them, read from the package, told us they cost six dollars, a classmate goes, "Hey, can we light one up?"

Sounded like a good activity to me. We went outside, someone pulled out a Bic, and those who wanted joined me and lit up on the steps outside Jenkins Hall. Few were real smokers, but they went along with the activity, and the dean didn't come by. But even if she had, as another student told me once, "Whom cares?" Tenure for a professor is as good as a scholarship: You got it, use it. Folks around the college would have been disappointed in me if I hadn't done it.

Justin had missed several classes, and I asked if anyone had seen him. A girl said she knew where he lived. I said, "Why don't we go over there and see if we can find him?" Field trip. "And while we're out, let's stop at McDonald's on the way back for ice cream."

Three blocks later and up a flight of stairs in a place that could, with money, be upgraded to a slum, we found Justin. Lucky he was alone. Groggy maybe at two in the afternoon, but by himself. He took it in good form and promised to show up next time. And we enjoyed the ice cream.

The first few sessions after spring break, I started to inquire about Jessica. She always wanted to have class outside as some professors pretend to do on pretty days. I said we could go outside, but we would not have class. So we'd just go out, pretend we're collecting bugs for science.

Jessica had done well the first half but didn't show up when we started back after spring break. I went out to the Outback restaurant where she worked, and no one there had seen her. Her mother hadn't heard from her.

A few days later, one of the girls said Jessica had gone to the beach with her boyfriend and decided just to stay down there. We voted on Jessica's behavior and a majority of the class thought she had made a good move, something we should all consider. I gave her some kind of grade in the class that could be resurrected rather than punish her with an F. Jessica came back in the fall, picked up where she left off, did her work, and wound up with a B.

Kendy told us a story about when she was in the fifth grade and got in trouble for using the word *shit* in a paper she handed in to the teacher. The teacher took umbrage at this and referred the matter to Kendy's mother. That evening, after dinner, her mother called the family together—the father, a brother, a sister—and brought the issue up for discussion. After her mother told the rest of the family the story, she said, "I know we are a strong Christian family and, with all my heart, I believe we can get through this." They did.

On the day of the final examination, Mary called me from St. Mary's Hospital, where she had become a new patient—nothing too serious. She asked if I would give her an incomplete and let her come back later and make up the final when she felt better. She had an A going in and didn't want to take the B I offered. I talked to her awhile, asked if I could bring her a milkshake.

Now, I knew Mary was a good student and a good person, had the qualities anyone would want in a teacher. So I just said, "Mary, how about if we just forget the whole damn thing? Call it off, you know what I mean? I'll give you the A and be done with it. I don't want to fool with the paperwork anyway. But don't tell anybody."

Friend for life. When I needed some old pictures of people in Logan County at a family reunion held in a graveyard for a story I was writing, I called Mary, and she fixed me up. The old quid pro quo.

A student told us she bought a family-sized box of raisin bran at Sam's Club that lasted her three semesters, still had to throw some out. Another said her grandma, talking about how not to get pregnant and how to use birth control pills, told her the pill to use was aspirin: Hold one between your knees.

When someone used the phrase "hind end," I asked a girl from New York City if she had ever heard that. "No," she said. "What does it mean?"

> When these young folks revealed themselves, you could see how simple but powerful rituals had helped form their characters.

I said, "It's an expression we would use, like 'get your hind end in the car.'"

She went, "Well, at home, we just say, 'Get your ass in the car.'" I had to admit Appalachians have a million words and phrases they use, like *gentleman cow* for *bull; shoot* for, well, you know; *durn it* for *damn.* We didn't even use the word *swear.* We might say, "I *swan.*" Growing up on the streets of New York City, you're not likely to hear cleaned-up cuss words.

Another girl was in my office, having me look over her registration form for next term's classes. I looked at her choices, noted a problem teacher, and pondered how I could point her in the best direction I could without putting down a colleague. The girl hadn't yet learned to ask around before she registered. I hum-hawed a little, pointed out some other classes in her program, showed her how she had four years or more to take requirements, but she still didn't drop the problem class. Finally, I just said, "Some students think the guy's an asshole." She picked out some more reasonable classes, stayed and talked awhile. Leaving the office, she said, "Thanks, Dr. Fulks," dropping her voice as she said my last name, a way country kids have of showing love. She knew that was the way her daddy would have said it. Made it clear.

Christopher told us he had been on a date. After the movie, he drove out to Gobbler's Knob, a popular lover's lane. The car's console and gearshift lever were keeping them apart as he turned up the stereo on a sweet love song. So he asked her, "Do you want to get in the back seat?" She said, "No, I'd rather stay up here with you."

Students from West Virginia towns with romantic names like Rainelle, Hinton, Gauley Bridge, and Pocatalico were sprinkled among those who grew up in the coalfields. When these young folks revealed themselves, you could see how simple but powerful rituals had helped form their characters.

Most went to little country churches without taper lighters, men in robes, or silver chalices. They sang, heard heartfelt sermons, and were quiet as old men testified. They helped prepare and ate big greasy breakfasts before the men went out to hunt. As teenage boys and girls, they rode four-wheelers and gasoline-powered vehicles called Mules through trails and across creeks. They spent Thanksgiving at Grandma's, Christmas with Mom and Dad, and worked part-time in mom-and-pop video rental stores. They dressed up for proms, rode in cars down two-lane blacktops, maybe got high after the dance. They helped build houses for the poor, hiked along the banks of the New River, listened to bluegrass in beer joints. They slept through high school assemblies as former drug addicts gave ominous warnings and sat in hot black gowns during high school commencements as speakers droned on into the night.

The youth in Appalachia learned to play roles showing deference to big shots, suits, politicians who might control their parents' jobs. Driving, they dodged coal trucks on dangerous roads and thought it was fun. They smiled and nodded, reached up their hands to Jesus. But left on their own, they were just as quick as anyone to make fun of fat people, cops, teachers, gays, preachers, the stupid among us, food stamps, and themselves. With sly grins, they cannibalized used car parts, lived in friends' places off-the-books, and slipped whiskey into paper cups of Sprite at football games.

A low, cool irony permeated their souls, and we were all the better for it. N&T

Danny Fulks is professor emeritus at Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., and adjunct professor at Ohio University-Southern Ohio Branch, Ironton. His story, "Clyde Raymond Beatty: Bainbridge, Ohio's Cat Man," was recently published in Timeline *from the Ohio Historical Society, and his collection,* Tragedy on Greasy Ridge, *comes out in 2003 from the Jesse Stuart Foundation.*

Lessons

The assignment was to draw the moon.

Filled with kindergarten wonder she climbed
as high as the rusting swing could offer
and balanced in the phosphorescent
rays of the evening's business
and saw beyond to the airy regions
where bands of chalky cirrus crossed
trails of jets forming tic-tac-toe battle plains
played by earth and sky. Too, she noted how
in all the stars that flecked the ether
not a one was yellow or five-pointed
but were sparkles of pixie-dust ripe
for scooping and sprinkling at show-and-tell.
That night she looked with the wonder of Copernicus,
was kissed by flames that swallowed van Gogh
and wanted to share it all with all who cared to know
what she now knew to be a night sky. Using every
shade of color of her blunted crayons, she drew:
from eyes to mind to heart to hands, she drew.
Who knew her greatest lesson would be in discovering
the dispirited frown of an exacting teacher
who across curled lips breathed,

The assignment was to draw the moon.

—S.d. Collins

For several years S.d. Collins taught writing at the Tennessee School for the Deaf. Currently, he is a doctoral candidate studying the experience of writing. Collins is married to an angel with whom he shares three young children.

Transforming Lives: The Access Program

by Jane Harris Woodside

Ohio is exporting an inexpensive yet effective program designed to convince Appalachian high school students that they just might be college material, after all.

It's an award-winning program that has produced impressive results over the past decade. It's been replicated, first in West Virginia and, most recently, in Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. And it carries with it a relatively modest price tag.

The Access program, first developed by the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education (OACHE), is a unique partnership of public schools and 10 public higher educational institutions, including technical, community, and four-year colleges. Its aim is to increase the college-going rate among high school students in the 29 Appalachian Ohio counties that sweep southeast in an arc from Columbiana County in the east to Clermont County, just outside of Cincinnati. *College* in this context is shorthand for any accredited post-secondary institution.

In a study gauging the OACHE model's impact to be released this spring, Jeffrey H. Schwartz, education program manager for the Washington, D.C.-based Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), found that not only do college-going rates improve dramatically after the Access program's first year but also those gains are sustained over time. Before an OACHE-model program was put in place, in most schools only 25 to 45 percent of high school graduates sought some form of post-secondary education. After Access program interventions, between 60 and 90 percent chose to continue.

OACHE's work has received recognition. Most recently, the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award program, administered by Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, named the Center as a finalist. OACHE is now waiting to see if it will be among the five winners to be announced in May; winners each receive $100,000 to help continue their work.

Rural kids have seen college as being for other folks.

Beginnings

It all began in the late 1980s when Bob Evans, founder of the Columbus, Ohio-based Bob Evans Farms restaurant and food products company, was serving on the Ohio Board of Regents, the state's higher education governing board. Evans drew attention to Appalachian Ohio's low college-going rate. In response, the Regents and the state's Rural Universities program commissioned the Access and Success study.

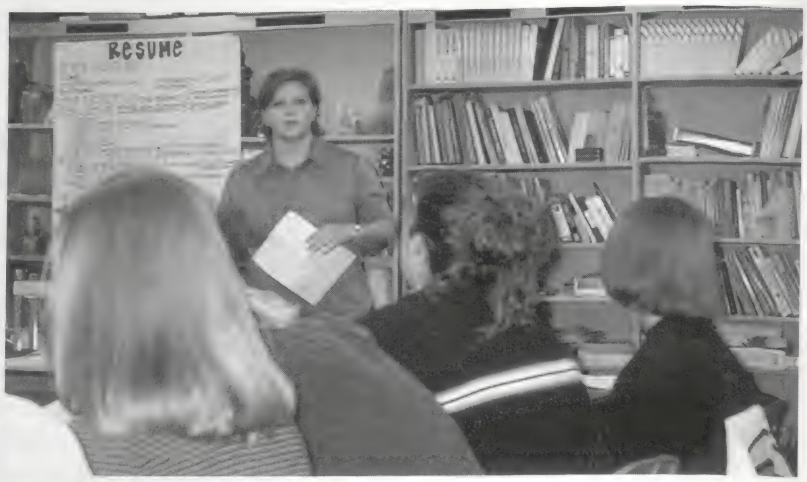
Between 1990 and 1992, the Access study surveyed high school seniors, their parents, and high school staff members, among others. It found that while 80 percent of seniors expressed interest in furthering their education, only about 30 percent actually did so, representing roughly half the national average. In response to these findings, the Ohio General Assembly established OACHE in 1993. Headquartered at Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, Ohio, the Center has been directed by Appalachian Ohio-native Wayne F. White since its inception. White, a former public school teacher and administrator, was called out of retirement to take the job.

Over the years, OACHE has expanded to include complementary activities such as U.S. Department of Education-funded programs designed to encourage everyone from middle school students in less affluent schools to low-income adults to seek post-secondary education. Most recently, the Center has become the conduit for $2 million of tobacco settlement

funds earmarked to provide educational assistance to those affected by the winding down of the U.S. tobacco industry.

Still, it is the Access program that is the centerpiece of OACHE's efforts to bolster Appalachian Ohio's educational level. And at the heart of the Access approach to the problem are the public schools. So far, the Center has awarded on a competitive basis slightly more than $955,000 to 57 K-12 schools, each in a different school district. There are 149 school districts in Appalachian Ohio.

Access' board of directors consists of an Ohio Board of Regents representative and the presidents or administrators from the 10 member higher educational institutions. Despite this, the board has an excellent track record of carrying out the program's mission: namely, to increase the college-going rate to *any* college — public or private, in Ohio or outside its borders.



Connie Bradbury

River Valley (Gallia County, Ohio) High School students listen to a presentation on resumes while visiting the University of Rio Grande.

The program, White points out, isn't targeting the brightest and best students who more than likely are already planning to seek additional education. "Our target group is that large block of students in the middle, students who have ability and don't know it," says White. "We have to convince these kids that they have that ability — and then watch them grow."

Barriers

What causes did the 1992 Access study unearth to explain Appalachian Ohio's poor college-going rate? According to the ARC's Schwartz, the Ohio study found the same barriers to college attendance that have surfaced in a number of studies conducted throughout the country. "The ones at the top of the list are social, emotional, and psychological," he reports. "The key barriers are lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, lack of experience and knowledge about what going to college is like." Surprisingly, lack of funds isn't a major obstacle. "Money is probably fifth or sixth on that list, if not farther down." And when money is mentioned, the problem is that most students and their families tend to overestimate the cost of college and underestimate the availability of financial aid.

As someone who grew up in a farm family in Lawrence County's Greasy Ridge community at the southern tip of Ohio, White can speak about these barriers from personal experience. Neither of his parents had attended college. "At home, we were encouraged to find a better quality of life. Appalachians want every generation to do better," White notes. But higher education wasn't the ticket to improving your lot. "Work skills were — and we developed those skills at home: growing up on farms and raising tobacco." Also, although the community strongly supported its local schools, his elders repeatedly cautioned him to "not get above your raising," a commonplace piece of advice heard throughout Appalachia.

As White began his senior year of high school, he had no intention of going to college. "The steel mills were booming in the 1960s, and a decent living could be earned," he remembers. However, Kenneth McCaulley, his high school principal, had other plans in mind for the young man. Despite White's less than stellar performance, the principal took him aside and urged him to try for a scholarship to Ohio University's nearby Ironton campus. White did win a scholarship, graduated with honors, and eventually worked in public education for 30 years in Southern Ohio, first as a middle school science teacher and then as an administrator. When he retired in 1992, he was superintendent of the Dawson-Bryant school district on the Ohio River.

"Obviously the lack of role models in communities where few people had ever been to college and the availability of good-paying jobs in the past that did not require higher education: Those are factors that help explain Appalachian Ohio's low college attendance rate," says White. "But low self-esteem is the most persistent problem. Rural kids have seen college as being for other folks."

Today's young people entering the workforce in Appalachian Ohio face a very different economic landscape than the one White surveyed in the 1960s. No longer can they count on being able to make a decent living in mills, mines, or factories. Those employment opportunities began to disappear about 20 years ago and have been replaced by low-wage jobs in the retail and service sectors.

Of the 29 Appalachian Ohio counties, 11 are currently classified as economically distressed by the ARC. Unemployment in December 2002 stood at 6.3 percent, only slightly higher than the U.S. rate of 6 percent. However, there was a considerable disparity in rates among the Appalachian Ohio counties. Unemployment rates ranged from 2.9 percent in Holmes County, with its large Amish population, to a high of 14 percent in Morgan County; 19 of the 29 Appalachian counties had unemployment rates above the national average and nine exceeded 7 percent. Appalachian Ohio's per capita income in 1999 was $20,516, or only 71.9 percent of national average. Current economic conditions, then, underscore the importance of encouraging the region's young people to seek the education

Making sure that the entire school staff feels ownership in the project not only helps ensure its success, but it also has far-reaching consequences. The school climate is fundamentally changed.

or training that will turn them into the highly skilled workforce that will attract employers who pay decent wages to the area.

The Blueprint

Appalachian Ohio public schools apply to OACHE for either a "model" or an "innovative" Access project grant. Model grants are designed for traditional four-year high schools, while elementary and vocational schools are eligible under the innovative program that gives them the chance to tailor the model program components to suit their specific situations. Roughly 40 proposals are received each grant cycle, usually about evenly split between the model and innovative programs. A little less than half of the proposals are typically funded.

The model program grew out of a blueprint developed at Newcomerstown High School in Tuscarawas County, one of the first schools to receive an Access grant. The high school is part of a system where currently 52 percent of its students qualify for reduced or free lunches based on family income.

Newcomerstown guidance counselor Pat Cadle, who coordinated his high school's Access activities, has documented that while only 28 to 32 percent of all Newcomerstown students furthered their educations between 1983 and 1993, an average of 64 percent sought post-secondary training in the nine years following the implementation of the Access program in 1993. "The major change over the past 10 years has been in the students' attitude," comments Cadle. "Most of our students now believe that they are going to take that next step in their education because they have seen so many others before them go on to post-secondary institutions. It's now *why* you go to high school." In addition, the school believes that by helping students see the point to their high school education, the Access program has contributed to improved attendance rates and a decline in major discipline problems.

The Newcomerstown model consists of activities beginning in the ninth grade and then intensifying as the students close in on graduation. During the freshman and sophomore years, for example, students use material from career centers that have been upgraded with Access funds to research options, and they participate in career fairs. All sophomores take the pre-ACT Plan test and complete the accompanying career inventory questionnaires.

Undoubtedly, the Access activities with the most impact during those early years of high school are the field trips students take to local businesses. The idea of including field trips originally grew out of conversations between Newcomerstown superintendent David Branch and Cadle. "We decided that to get kids to want to go to college, they had to know what jobs required a college education," says Cadle.

Many Access projects, both in Ohio and in other Appalachian states, follow Newcomerstown's lead and take their students both to desirable and less-than-desirable work environments. The latter have come to be known by a term Cadle coined: the "smelly" places. For example, there is just such an odoriferous plant turning out rubber products near the Newcomerstown High School. It offers low-paying jobs to young people with little education. "We want them to see that if you don't get training, this is where you could end up," says Cadle. When students return to school from these field trips, they are required to report on their experiences for class credit.

In their junior and senior years, students also have the option to visit all manner of post-secondary institutions. "Students get to see colleges — big and small, private and public," says Cadle. Adds White, "We have found that college visits are critical to the success of the program." Cadle agrees, pointing out that before students can decide whether or not some type of college is in their futures, they have to be able to visualize what college is like. So on their visits, they meet with college administrators, visit dorms, eat in cafeterias, and, most importantly, spend time in actual classrooms.

Such field trips are augmented with making college and career information available in high traffic areas, such as the school library or cafeteria; with giving students access to ACT or SAT preparation classes, when possible; and by bringing in motivational speakers. By junior year, the schools reach out to parents as well, scheduling evening meetings to guide them through the application process and to help them with their search for financial aid. "We know money is going to be a problem," acknowledges Cadle, who was the oldest of seven children from a poor Appalachian family. He financed his own college education with his earnings and loans. "But we make a big point of saying that not having money is a poor excuse for not going. If you want to go on for more education, there's a way, and we'll help you find it."

Cloning the Model

The first test as to whether the OACHE model could be replicated came in West Virginia. In September 1998, the North Central Appalachian Center for Higher Education (NCACHE) opened with $35,000 per year for two years in seed money from the ARC and another $50,000 for the first year from the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts. NCACHE was

Regina G. Webb

OACHE executive director Wayne White (l) takes Pike County (Ohio) high school students on a college campus tour in April 2001.

a joint project of the Community Colleges of Appalachia and Bluefield State College (BSC) in Bluefield, W.Va. Its original mission was to improve the college-going rate in both West Virginia and in Appalachian Maryland.

By 2000, since schools awarded the two-year Access grants were already showing a significant increase in their college-going rates, it was clear that the model had successfully taken root. It was also decided that the Center, housed at BSC, should concentrate exclusively on West Virginia schools. Re-named the West Virginia Access Center for Higher Education (WVACHE), the Center is headed by Sarita Gattuso, a Welch, W.Va.-native, a first-generation college graduate, and a former teacher who is now BSC's director of outreach programs.

After WVACHE had proven that the Ohio model could be transplanted, the Appalachian governors committed in 2000 to establishing similar centers in each state throughout the region. The ARC has continued to provide approximately $60,000 to $65,000 per year in start-up monies for the first two years that each center must match on a one-to-one basis. The ARC also provides for training and technical assistance, supplied largely by White and Gattuso, and supports the attendance of directors of these fledgling centers at the OACHE/WVACHE annual conference. After the first two years, centers are expected to find funding from other sources. WVACHE, for example, has obtained a $150,000 private donation from Bob Evans and additional support from the Pittsburgh-based Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation.

The Kentucky Higher Education Network Center, based at Morehead State University in Morehead, Ky., and a center at the HERO Family Resource Center in Greensboro, Ala., both opened in August 2000. The North Mississippi Appalachian Center for Higher Education, housed at the Advanced Education Center in Tupelo, Miss., came online in September 2001, while the newest center, the Tennessee Appalachian Higher Education Center, was established in March 2002 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT).

Innovations

What has been followed in these replication centers is the model program. But, as WVACHE's Gattuso points out, "The model gives you room to be innovative."

For example, high school teachers in many of the participating high schools designate a day when they all wear sweatshirts representing their alma maters. White reports that those sweatshirts spark many conversations that start with students asking such questions as, "Well, how was it at Ohio U?" In Pine Grove, W.Va., Valley High School sponsored a T-shirt design contest open to any student who had been accepted by a college. Davey McDiffitt, currently attending West Virginia University, won with a shirt that proclaimed, "Gettin' Ready to Go Because Somebody Wants Me..."

Cadle started a Next Step Board at Newcomerstown, an idea that has been copied, and even improved upon, by many schools. "I have a big poster with every senior's name on it that takes up most of a wall," says Cadle. "As they decide what they're going to do, they write their plans next to their name. It's become a source of pride, a place where they can say, 'This is where I'm going.'"

Then there's Mount View High School in Welch. It's initiated a daylong "reality check" each spring. Various businesses from the community — banks, grocery stores, car dealers, insurance and travel agencies, and furniture stores, for example — set up in booths constructed by vocational students. Students are allotted a month's salary based on the occupation they've selected. They also draw a "chance" card that tosses one of life's curve balls at them. "A student might end up unmarried with two kids, and they definitely weren't planning on that," says Gattuso.

Students then visit the various booths as they meet their financial obligations. "They have to pay the rent and buy groceries and diapers before they can even consider purchasing a car. You hear a lot of moaning and groaning," Gattuso laughs. "But it wakes them up, makes them understand that $5.15 an hour just doesn't cut it." Community participation grows each year.

Baby Steps and Buy-In

The keys to success, White has found, are repetition and, especially, what he calls "total school buy-in." Says the OACHE director, "You can bring in a speaker and spike interest in college. You can go on a college visit. But unless that's continually followed by what we call 'baby steps,' it's not going to work. It takes repetition of a lot of activities, and it takes all the school staff — from the principal to the bus drivers who take the kids on their field trips — buying into the program and encouraging students on a daily basis."

Total school buy-in starts early. The project needs to be discussed with the school staff even before the Access project proposal is submitted. It is particularly critical that the person who eventually serves as project coordinator plays an active role in writing the grant application. The coordinator is most frequently

Jayn'e Chapple

The T-shirt, designed by Valley High School graduate Davey McDiffitt, says it all. It is modeled by current senior Tiffany Ice, who will be heading off to college next fall.

Newcomerstown believes that by helping students see the point to their high school education, the Access program has contributed to improved attendance rates and a decline in major discipline problems.

a guidance counselor, administrator, or teacher who supervises the OACHE program at their school. They receive no additional pay for their efforts.

Making sure that the entire school staff feels ownership in the project not only helps ensure its success, but it also has far-reaching consequences. The school climate is fundamentally changed. "Encouraging students to consider higher education becomes part of the system," says Gattuso.

According to Gattuso, the emphasis in many rural schools has been on simply dissuading students from dropping out. "For some, graduation is a big step," she allows. Terry Lashley, yet another former teacher who is now the Appalachian Rural Systemic Initiative's resource collaborative director in UT's College of Education, directs the Tennessee Appalachian Higher Education Center. She observes, "Traditionally, I think some schools have only looked at certain students as having the potential to go to college. Through this program, schools are given resources so that all students have the information that allows them to make a decision about their futures. No one should be denied that choice."

The change in attitude is so fundamental that Access activities continue even after project funding ends. For example, Newcomerstown has not received Access funding since 2001. Although Cadle can currently draw on $50,000 that came with a 2000 Ohio's BEST award, bestowed in recognition of the school's innovative educational programs, he estimates that with the improvements made possible by Access funds, he only needs about $2,000 to keep the activities going. The major cost is transportation for field trips. In some cases, participating colleges are helping to shoulder part of that burden.

Work To Be Done

There is still work to be done. Centers and their participating public schools are always looking for ways to refine the OACHE model, they are continuing to help establish replications in the remaining Appalachian states, and they are poised to take a look at how these students do when they've actually enrolled. "Do they stay, do they persevere, or do they drop out?" asks the ARC's Schwartz. "If we find out the latter is true, then we need to build that next step into the program to tackle that problem." In addition to the request for proposals for new centers that ARC hopes to release this spring, the agency also plans to ask for proposals to conduct research on how Appalachian students fare in their post-secondary careers.

But the program's accomplishments to date give all those involved a sense that they're on the right track in their approach to a problem found in pockets throughout the Appalachian region. "You see, the thing that's so important is that there's so much ability there, untapped ability," says the ever-ebullient White. "The capability of these students is right there, just under the surface. And these programs simply uncover that. The children of Appalachia have a tremendous capability to learn and produce and be active members of society and contribute to the revenues of the state and the nation."

Says Gattuso, "I don't know what it is about our Appalachian culture that makes us think we're less intelligent than other people. It isn't true. But I felt the same way when I was growing up in Welch." Gattuso seems to speak for many of those involved with the Access program, people who identify with the problem and feel a personal stake in the outcome. "I can't tell you the satisfaction it gives me to see a school transformed." N&T

Jane Harris Woodside is Now & Then's *editor-in-chief.*

Remembering

I.
On your mark, get set, go
and we race, sandals slapping the sidewalk,
opposite directions, around the corner, parallel
sidestreets, down the alley fast fast
over the gravel to the gate to the gate
and my sister, legs longer, always first.

II.
Sneaking up the back porch stairs
holding the door against the slam
surprise in my other hand
reaching high tip-toes to get a glass
water from the faucet
perfect there in the middle of the table
later the smiling voices saying
oh look, she's gone and brought in
those alley weeds

III.
Next door canes and spotted hands and grey hair
and the "well now just sit yourself down here
and tell us how in the world have you been, child"
because it's been a year and I'm taller and my hair is longer
and they want to tell me about their granddaughter
who is my same age and I listen and listen
and finally they are saying now how about
you get you one of those butterscotch candies in the dish

IV.
In the front porch swing for hours
staring up at the mountains
and all the green green leaves
moving in the breeze
the old pipes strung up with fishing wire
chime and maybe this is a storm-bringing wind
and rain on the metal roof will dance me to sleep tonight

—Julie Dunlop

Although Julie Dunlop grew up in Vienna, Va., a suburb of Washington, D.C., she has returned to her mother's family home in Appalachia, Va., to stay with her grandmother. Dunlop has a master's degree in English from the University of New Mexico, where she received the Academy of American Poets Award for 2000 and 2001. Last fall, she had a residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Her poems have been published in Appalachian Heritage *and* The Sow's Ear Poetry Review.

Father Joseph

(Or How I Became a Catholic Presbyterian)

by Anwar Accawi

A writer now living in Knoxville, Tennessee, thinks back to his Lebanese childhood and the peculiar efforts of an overzealous priest to save his soul.

In 1950, when I was a little over eight, my father landed a good job with an oil company that had a training center about ten kilometers south of Sidon, Lebanon. His job was to prepare new employees — engineers, technicians, and heavy equipment operators from the United States and Europe — to work in the oil fields of Saudi Arabia.

The center was a kind of decompression chamber where the new employees were lectured on Saudi Arabian history, religion, and language before they were shipped out to a world that could have easily been on Mars or Dune. My father made a fairly good salary, which meant the family could afford to move to a big apartment in a reasonably decent neighborhood in South Sidon. This also meant that I could go to a private Catholic school within walking distance from where we lived.

The school my parents enrolled me in was called Al-Imtiaz, which roughly translated means *excellence.* It was a progressive school run by Miss Rihani, a tough Catholic spinster who had arthritis and long red fingernails. Miss Rihani also had a beautiful singing voice, and she was in love with Jameel, her redheaded chauffeur, who was a good Catholic, too.

But Miss Rihani, who liked to be called just plain "Miss," ran a tight ship, and the teachers and the program were rated among the best in all of south Lebanon.

I liked everything about my new school, except one thing — the mandatory religious studies class. I tried to get out of taking it. I did everything I could. I even told Miss that I was a Presbyterian — so predestination told me that I was already chosen — and I had no need for any more religious education, but she was adamant. She would not hear of it. Miss believed that everybody, especially chosen Presbyterians, had to have some kind of spiritual education. And that was that.

All the other kids at Al-Imtiaz were either Muslims, who received their religious instruction at the feet of a turbaned sheikh, or Catholics, who got their theology at the hands of a faded Roman Catholic priest. Being a Presbyterian, I was neither fish nor fowl. But because I was a Christian, I was more fish than fowl in that I had more in common with the Catholics than I did with the Muslims. For one thing, Presbyterians, like Catholics, had nothing against drinking

lots of *arrack* (a strong, ouzo-like alcoholic drink) or eating pork and web-footed things. And we both were called swine by the Muslim kids. So the logical thing to do was to place me in the Roman Catholic class, which was taught by a priest called Abuna Yussef (Arabic for Father Joseph).

Father Joseph was a short, skinny priest in his late fifties or early seventies. There was no telling how old he was because his wrinkles had wrinkles. He wore his black cassock like a teepee, and he moved about freely within its

All the other kids at Al-Imtiaz were either Muslims, who received their religious instruction at the feet of a turbaned sheikh, or Catholics, who got their theology at the hands of a faded Roman Catholic priest. Being a Presbyterian, I was neither fish nor fowl.

folds without disturbing it at all on the outside. His feet were not visible beneath his long garment, so when he walked around, he appeared to be floating on air, much like a Hovercraft. We could not see what was going on under that black cloak of his, but when he stuck his bony arms up to the elbows into his deep pockets, all of us boys had a pretty good idea what he was doing inside his tent. I remember how we used to peer at him, then look at each other and cover our mouths with our brown hands and snicker — until he transfixed us with his piercing, Rasputiny gaze.

Behind his back, I called him "Pig Eyes." I gave him that nickname because his yellow, beady eyes reminded me of Squealer's, a pig I had read about in a book called *Animal Farm.* Like Squealer, Father Joseph pranced about the room, with a cunning look on his face, and terrorized us kids (every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon) with stories about death, final judgment, and hell — his most favored topics.

His thin, ashen beard, which hung from his sallow face like dry corn silk, had a yellow streak that ran from his chronically cracked lower lip down to his enormous brass belt buckle. Because Father Joseph was a chain smoker, his index and middle fingers were yellow, like my father's, and his teeth were long and yellow, too. They looked like the teeth of the big bad wolf in "Red Riding Hood." Father Joseph was altogether one terrifying yellow priest. But he was a shrewd salesman.

At the beginning of the school year, Father Joseph talked us into buying from him a thin little book, which was nothing but a collection of questions and answers. He told us that we had to have this book if we were serious about saving our souls from eternal hellfire and everlasting damnation. The book cost one Lebanese lira (about 30 cents), which was a small fortune when I was in the third grade. With that much money, I could have bought enough lollipops and bubble gum to last me till Christmas. But I figured I needed that book to make sure I was saved, just in case my church was not telling me the whole story. At that price, salvation was a bargain.

And it was easy to get, too. All I had to do was memorize the answer to each question and, upon being asked, blurt the answer out as fast as I could, the faster the better. There were many questions in the book about the saints, the Virgin Mary and the Immaculate Conception, and other wonderful things I had never even heard of in our Presbyterian Sunday School before, and I was both excited and intrigued by them. I felt I was learning something valuable.

But one of the most important lessons Father Joseph managed to teach me was the one about God's inexhaustible forgiveness. He said that no matter how terrible and evil we were, God, through Jesus His good Son, was willing to forgive us and take us back if we confessed our sins to Him and were truly repentant. As one of the elect, this was not very hard for me to grasp, but it was good, every now and then, to hear Father Joseph confirm to me what I already knew.

And I used what he taught me well. For instance, when I played hooky and lied about it or when I tampered with my report card to protect my hide, I let Father Joseph know, and he told me to say the Lord's Prayer ten times and pray five Hail Marys in order to get forgiveness, which I gladly did.

However, it wasn't long before I hit upon the idea that I could be — and should be — "prayed up" or "prayed ahead" against future failings. So every time I had a little free time on my hands, I repeated the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary to myself, thereby creating a bank of prayers or indulgences to meet future contingencies. In other words, each time I screwed up, I was prepared, and all I had to say was "Lord, take three of the Hail Marys and seven of Your prayers from the bank, and we'll call it even." The Lord didn't seem to mind, Father Joseph never found out, and I got away with a few nasty things that I needed to grow on.

The religious studies class was not exactly fun and games most of the time. But there were some times that were worse than others. Because Father Joseph was intent on saving our souls, by hook or by

Father Joseph was altogether one terrifying yellow priest. But he was a shrewd salesman.

crook, sometimes he went to bizarre lengths, even to the point of using terror tactics and outright intimidation. He wanted so much to keep us out of hell that he made our lives a living hell with some of the stories he told us. I still remember one of those encounters in his class as vividly as if it had happened only yesterday.

One bright June afternoon, when the orange trees were in full bloom and the air was heavy with their sweet fragrance, Father Joseph came into the classroom a little late, which was not like him at all. He looked heartbroken, with tears glistening in the corners of his eyes. I had never seen him like that before, and I was concerned. I sat up and began to search his face for what might have

brought about his piteous condition. But he didn't say a word. He just stood there and looked miserable.

Then, very slowly and deliberately, he stuck his hand deep into his pocket and pulled out an envelope. He held it up high for everybody to see. Then he rustled it open and unfolded the yellowed sheet inside it. He surveyed us long and hard with that hurt look in his eyes.

He cleared his throat and in a trembling voice announced, "I have just received … ahem … a letter … from a girl

> Father Joseph came into the classroom a little late, which was not like him at all. He looked heartbroken, with tears glistening in the corners of his eyes.

who died in a car accident last year." When I heard that, my immediate reaction was, "Jesus Christ, Father, what are you saying? What in the world are you telling us? The dead write? You get letters from dead children? How could the dead write to the living? In the name of Allah, how?" But I said nothing. Everybody was quiet. We were petrified.

Thinking that what he had told us did not quite sink in, Father Joseph cleared his throat again and repeated what he had just said. There was no doubt about it now. I had heard him right the first time. This little yellow priest gets yellowed letters from dead kids. He was freaking us out with that letter of his. Jesus! How can that be? How can such a thing be? I did not know what to think. But Father Joseph had to be telling us the truth. He had the proof right there in his shaky hands for everybody to see. And in order to clear up any remaining doubts in our heads that the letter was genuine, he pointed out that the edges had been slightly charred. You had to be blind not to see that.

Then he proceeded to read to us Theresa's (that was her name) letter in which she explicitly described the torments of hell. She wrote about how thirsty she was all the time, and that whatever little water she had to drink was hot and full of stinkbugs. She described the screams of the damned and how sorry they were for not having been obedient boys and girls while they were alive and how useless their pleadings for mercy were because, for them, it was just too late.

At that point Maggie, whose desk was next to mine, started to whimper, and she wet herself. She just let go and made a puddle so big you could have floated a small fishing boat in it. Next to her, Elie, who was the only kid in class more fastidious than I, got up to get away from the advancing yellow tide. He tripped and fell, face down, on the edge of Marie's desk. He cut his lip and bled like a stuck pig. When Antoinette saw the blood dripping off Elie's chin, her eyes rolled back into her head, and she passed out cold. Leila, her deskmate, whinnied like a young filly, got up on her hind legs, and shot out the door knocking Father Joseph flat on his ass (I got to see his shoes; they were size 7, narrow and black).

Then all hell broke loose. There were kids running over desks, jumping out of windows, and fleeing out the door as if a swarm of hornets were on their tails. There was shouting and crying and screaming as kids stepped on one another, looking for a place to run. In the midst of this bedlam, I saw the twin sisters, Hadia and Ghania, wildly flailing their arms like two excited orangutans as they ran around and around the teacher's desk in circles. They were going nowhere. They just ran around and around, jumping up and down and screaming.

The older kids, the fourth and fifth graders, heard the ruckus and came running out of their classrooms to see what the racket was all about. Some of the boys came rushing out of the bathrooms while hurriedly pulling their pants up. Others didn't even bother to look decent. They came hopping out with their britches around their ankles. It was the kind of pandemonium that every kid fantasizes about but rarely gets to see.

The school principal, the teachers, and the janitor spent the better part of the afternoon gathering kids from the places where they'd run to hide. Some had climbed up into the orange trees in the schoolyard. Others sought safety in the crawl space under the school building, and some found a safe haven in the attic.

Waseem and his little sister Nahla were the last to be located. They had hidden themselves in an empty rainwater barrel behind the swimming pool. The lid on top of the barrel got stuck somehow, and they couldn't get out, hard as they tried. Someone heard their muffled cries and led Michel, the janitor, to them. He had to use a mattock to pry the lid open. Lucky for them the wooden barrel was old and cracked.

Elie disappeared and could not be found anywhere on the school grounds. He ran home and never came back to Al-Imtiaz. I heard that his mother had his lip

> It was the kind of pandemonium that every kid fantasizes about but rarely gets to see.

stitched up at the Clinique National and then signed him up at Gerard Institute, the American School just outside of town.

Within two months from the reading of Theresa's letter to us, Father Joseph was "banished" by his bishop to a monastery somewhere in the terraced hills east of Sidon. He remained there for the rest of his days.

It's been a little over fifty years now since that bright afternoon in early June, and Father Joseph has long since gone on to glory. But I haven't heard from him yet — not a word.

Meanwhile, I wait. And I keep my bank of prayers well-stocked with Our Fathers and Hail Marys. Only sometimes, when I catch a whiff of an orange tree in bloom or when the summer sun falls just so on my face, I remember my little priest, and then I wish there were some way for me to thank him for all the good things he gave me so many years ago and to let him know I am doing just fine. N&T

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Creating It Yourself

Appalshop's Appalachian Media Institute

by Liz McGeachy

Eastern Kentucky teenagers think about their communities in new ways after Appalshop instructs them in the techniques and art of documentary production.

When 19-year-old Natasha Watts looked at her Southeastern Kentucky home through a video camera lens, she started to see it from a different angle. She saw the same coal-filled mountains of Letcher County and the same people and neighborhood events she had grown up with, but somehow they were bathed in a different light.

"I've always been aware of my heritage," Watts says. "I've seen all that since I was little, but I never really viewed it as a special thing until I came here. That's when I realized we have a really nice heritage that a lot of people don't have. They don't get to say 'when I was little, I got to go to square dances.' It's made me proud of who I am and where I'm from."

Venturing Out into the Community

"Here" is the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI), a youth media program of Appalshop, the multidisciplinary arts and education center in Whitesburg, Ky. Watts was an intern in the 2002 AMI summer program, along with five other young people ranging in age from 17 to 19. During their 10 weeks with the program, they got a crash course in the basics of video and audio production — everything from interviewing to shooting to editing to distribution. They then went out into the community to create something with that knowledge. The end product might be an audio piece about a community event like a music festival, or it might be a video documentary about a neighborhood concern such as well water contaminated by coal mine runoff.

"They learn a lot about time management, organization, working with others," says Maureen Mullinax, AMI's director. "But mostly it helps them think about their community in a new way and to see themselves as making a difference and contributing and shaping the dialogues about their community."

This new view of community is nowhere more apparent than in the interns' final pieces — pieces that take up the bulk of the summer and usually end with a few all-nighters. Working in pairs, the interns pick a documentary topic, plan whom to interview and videotape, do the lighting and camera work, edit the pieces, add titles, and, in the final days of the program, present the videos to an eager audience in Appalshop's theater. In AMI's 14-year history, these videos have covered a wide range of topics: coalmining, the abuse of the drug OxyContin, snake-handling in church, rollerskating, gay and lesbian issues, polluted water, racism, honky-tonk music — all viewed within the framework of life in the Appalachian

> "I've always been aware of my heritage. I've seen all that since I was little, but I never really viewed it as a special thing until I came here."
>
> – Natasha Watts

Courtesy of Appalshop

AMI interns get a crash course in use of Appalahop's extensive media tools before going out into the community to produce their audio or video projects. Here, Janis Campbell, Ben Spangler, and Charity Quillen, interns from the summer 2002 session, learn how to edit their videos.

mountains as interpreted by the region's young people.

ATVs, Accents & Punk Rock

Watts and her project partner, Ryan Phillips, 17, decided to do their piece on the use of four-wheel all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) after hearing a National Public Radio (NPR) story about an 11-year-old West Virginia girl killed on an ATV.

"They [NPR] were more or less focusing on the point that it was the parents' fault that the girl got killed on the four-wheeler," Phillips says. "They were stereotyping people from West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky — the coalfields — as being stupid. You know, they were describing squirrel tails stapled to the doors and that kind of thing."

Watts and Phillips interviewed parents and young people who use ATVs responsibly and asked questions about safety issues and riding ATVs on strip-mined land, a common practice in the area. Interspersed among the interviews is footage of helmeted ATVers riding across old strip mines. The pair's final 12-minute piece is titled *Mountain Ride: ATVs, Stripmining, and Safety in Eastern Kentucky.*

Searching for an Appalachian Accent— by Kelli Caudill, 17, and Charity Quillen, 19 — grew out of a conversation the two young women had about prejudice against Appalachians and how that prejudice relates to the area's dialects. The 17-minute documentary features different points of view: people who have grown up in Eastern Kentucky and feel proud of their accent; a local commercial television journalist who has purposefully tried to lose his accent; a sociologist specializing in language; and even 1949 file footage of Ma and Pa Kettle. The piece is peppered with vintage photos of mountain families, local stories, and mountain singing.

"We're looking at Eastern Kentucky dialects and what it is about them that distinguishes them from other dialects," Quillen says. "Why do they retain a negative connotation? Why is there a stigma attached to the dialect, and how does holding on to that dialect help people hold on to their heritage?"

This piece was selected to be screened at the Tower of Youth Film Festival in California in October 2002.

Ben Spangler and Janis Campbell, both 19, chose a local youth organization as the subject of their 17-minute video because both had connections to the group. *Youth Bored: Uniting Appalachian Youth* explains how a group of Letcher County teenagers looking for something to do started their own organization to feature punk rock and heavy metal bands. It now has its own warehouse space where young people from all over the area come to perform or listen. In addition, a book club, film screenings, and a web site have also sprouted out of the organization. The interviews and footage of Youth Bored concerts shatter the banjo-picking stereotype of mountain music while still affirming aspects of Appalachian culture, such as the joy of making your own entertainment. "The whole idea is that when there's nothing to do, you have to create it yourself," Spangler says.

Using Media to Help Kids

Creating it yourself is really the bottom line of AMI and of its sponsor, Appalshop. The film, video, radio, music, and theater that comes out of Appalshop is dedicated to preserving and cultivating the Appalachian voice in media and art, so a program that teaches Appalachian young people to do the same is a natural outgrowth.

The story goes that one day in the 1980s, two Appalshop staff members were playing basketball and noticed several local young people around the basketball court. One of them said something like, "You know, we've got all these media tools at Appalshop. There ought to be a way to use them to help these kids." AMI was born soon after, in 1988.

At first, it was simply a summer program. Groups were generally larger than they are now — about 12 interns from age 15 to 18 — and many were from beyond the local area, which of course meant that they had to be housed in Whitesburg. The program has evolved over the years, however. This year, all six interns were from the general Letcher County area, so that providing housing was no longer necessary. They ranged from seniors in high

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>
> – Maureen Mullinax

school to sophomores in college. Mullinax believes the smaller groups and slightly older students mean a more focused program.

Young people hear about the program from teachers, community organizations, or directly from Appalshop and then apply to participate. In 2002, 24 people applied for six slots. Picking the final six who got to be interns was "really tough," says Mullinax. In addition to having access to Appalshop's equipment and expertise, each intern was paid $350 a week. Funding comes from a variety of sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Open Society Institute, the Kentucky Arts Council, and Appalshop's endowment fund.

Far-Reaching Effects

AMI's evolution has now taken it beyond the summer internship to a year-round program, one indication of the program's success. This year, Mullinax and others at Appalshop have started a twice-a-week afternoon media lab for students aged 14 to 21 — sort of a "mini-AMI." Mullinax also works with teachers from partner schools to help them use media in the classroom, and AMI has been part of several youth exchanges with other media-oriented groups throughout the nation. AMI interns have traveled to New York, Chicago, Texas, and Tennessee to attend youth media festivals or workshops, show their work, and discuss community issues with other young people. Teenagers from other parts of the country have come to do the same in Whitesburg as well.

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>
> – Charity Quillen

Courtesy of Appalshop

Charity Quillen, who along with Kelli Caudill chose to investigate the stigma associated with their Eastern Kentucky speech, shoots video footage for their documentary, *Searching for an Appalachian Accent.*

Another indication of AMI's success is the recognition it has received from outside organizations. One very notable award was the national Coming Up Taller Award presented to AMI in 1998 by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities for innovative arts work with disadvantaged youth. Intern Rhonda Thacker accepted the award on behalf of AMI from Hillary Clinton at the White House.

About 140 people have been through AMI's program now, and more than 30 of the videos produced are being distributed by Appalshop. These aren't just home movies either. Many of the documentaries have had stunning and far-reaching effects.

A 2001 AMI video, *Without a Cause: Sickness in Eolia, Kentucky,* helped people in a small coal mining community organize around the issue of contaminated water and the high cancer rates in the area. The screening of the video set the ball rolling for the community to gather information about illnesses there and present it to the Centers for Disease Control. Another one produced that same year, *Because of OxyContin,* focuses on the stories of mountain people who have been devastated by the misuse of this prescription painkiller, sometimes referred to as "hillbilly heroin." After the video's release, many people affected by the drug contacted Appalshop to praise the film. Even the not-very-happy makers of OxyContin (Stamford, Conn.-based Purdue Pharma) called to have a say about it, and U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers sent a copy to every member of the House and Senate in Washington, D.C., when legislation concerning the drug was being debated. *Through Their Eyes: Gays and Lesbians in the Mountains,* produced in 1999, has been aired on New York cable television. *Reaching for Higher Ground: Youth Activism,* produced in 2000, and *Through Their Eyes* were shown at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

Controversy

Like all effective documentaries, AMI's productions have occasionally caused controversy. One example is *Through Their Eyes.*

"One of the most interesting stories about picking a final project was when the group decided to do the piece about gays and lesbians and how difficult that was," Mullinax says. "That was a real test for the kids — and for me and for the program — because we lost a teacher over that. Basically, we lost a school. The

teacher thought it was an inappropriate subject, so we shouldn't allow them to do it. But that piece has also been shown across the country. Even though there are flaws with the piece, it's received a lot of attention. I guess that's one of my roles: to support the kids in whatever they want to do. But then they have to be able to deal with whatever comes with that."

And that is really the heart of AMI: teaching young people a skill, then allowing them to use it to portray and to affect their communities in a way that is genuine and true to these young people. Some of AMI's graduates have gone on to work in the media field, but the purpose of the program is broader than that. Mullinax describes the outcome of AMI this way: "It's them learning about their community and valuing it and seeing it in a really positive light. If I can hear one of them in their community saying, 'Man, I wish I had a camera,' then that's it — that movement from being a passive observer to being a participant and mover in what can happen in their community." N&T

About 140 people have been through AMI's program now, and more than 30 of the videos produced are being distributed by Appalshop. These aren't just home movies either. Many of the documentaries have had stunning and far-reaching effects.

Courtesy of Appalshop

AMI intern Natasha Watts holds the microphone for an Eolia, Ky., resident while she speaks at a screening/discussion for *Without a Cause: Sickness in Eolia, Kentucky.* The interns produced the screening in the community in part to learn how to create a community dialogue stimulated by the video.

AMI videos are available to purchase or rent from Appalshop, 91 Madison Ave., Whitesburg KY 41858, (606) 633-0108, ami@appalshop.org.

For more information and a list of videos, visit AMI's web site at www.appalshop.org/ami.

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A Reporter From New York Asks Edith Mae Chapman, Age Nine, What Her Daddy Tells Her About the Strike

We ain't to go in the company store, mooning
over peppermint sticks, shaming ourselves like dogs
begging under the table. They cut off our account
but we ain't no-accounts. We ain't to go to school
so's the company teacher can tell us we are.
We ain't going to meeting and bow our heads
for the company preacher, who claims it's the meek
will inherit the coalfields, instead of telling
how the mountains will crumble and rocks
rain down like fire upon the heads
of the coal operators, like it says in the Bible.
We ain't to talk to no dirtscum scabs
and we ain't to talk to God. My daddy
is very upset with the Lord.

—Diane Gilliam Fisher

Diane Gilliam Fisher, who currently lives in Ravenna, Ohio, is a recent graduate of Warren Wilson College's master's of fine arts program for writers. This poem is part of a collection in progress about the West Virginia Mine Wars of 1920-21.

MIRRORS

by Barbara Smith

When you're fourteen, you don't know who in the world you are.

You watch Amanda, your seventeen-year-old sister, drying her red hair, her eyes clear, her chin held high in front of the mirror, and you wonder if she was always who she is. You look out the late-afternoon window and see your three brothers in the spring-green yard. Two of them, nine and eleven, argue over who will ride the trail bike first. Your twin brother settles the matter by taking off on the bike himself. You watch him as he rides the path toward the woods, the ground still so soft that the tires kick mud. His jeans and boots will be filthy when he comes in, but your mother will not yell at him or at your younger brothers. They will simply dump their problems in the back hall, and she will solve them. She thinks she knows who they are, and they're sure they do.

Your mother is thin. She is thin and old, old, old, and she would disappear completely in a crowd. She stays at home, somehow coming up with supper, Boy Scout dues, a cake for the church dinner. She tries to keep the back hall clean. She is married to your father.

You hardly ever see him. He's at the mine, a shift foreman, she says, whenever the mine is working. He doesn't talk about it much, at least not when you're around, but sometimes when he comes in late, like when he's on the afternoon shift, you hear them talking in the kitchen below your bedroom. Their voices are high and tight with worry.

The mines, he has told you, run under these hills, under your house and under the church and under the grade school and even the distant middle school. "Someday," he has told you, the lines in his face gray with acid and coal dust, "this whole damned town will fall into the mines." This whole damned town will fall in on him. And that, he has told you, will take care of his problems.

You lay back hungry, not finishing your lunch, to listen to the other three who seem to know just who they are.

Yours, too. You will probably fall right in there with him, and he will see your broken bones and your multiple bruises, and he will hold you in his arms the way he seldom ever has in your above-ground life.

The whole damned town will fall in around you. You thought of that Tuesday and Friday last week, both times at noon when you and Diane and Shirley and Janet went out for lunch, getting permission from the teacher to cross the road, for all of you are good students.

You crossed the road to go into the hills that lie mysterious across from the school, those pockmarked hills useless to anyone except that they hide the mines below and, on top, those who hate school cafeterias.

That's what you did, you and Shirley and Diane and Janet, stripping off sweaters in the early spring sun, eating your bread

and cheese and your cookies, and you lay back hungry, not finishing your lunch, to listen to the other three who seem to know just who they are.

Diane especially. She's been going with Tom Gronovitch even though she's just fifteen, and she talks about him all the time. "Tom says that … Tom knows him … Tom thinks I ought to …" and you know that Diane will marry Tom Gronovitch, probably before they finish high school.

Janet and Shirley have boyfriends, too. Shirley a lot, lot more than Janet, but Shirley doesn't talk about them. She has boyfriends from Talcott, and they come to get her in their cars, sometimes even right from school. She doesn't talk much, but she smiles a secret-keeping smile when Diane starts talking about Tom. Shirley refuses to answer questions. Your mother thinks she's a bad girl.

You think you may be more like Janet. She doesn't have one special boyfriend, no one single guy to tell stories about, no special dates or backseat adventures or lies to tell to fool her folks. She looks like what she really is, her Italian blond hair cut very short, her shoulders broad, her legs very bony, her chest just now beginning to swell. She is awkward, and you know that you are a lot like Janet, but she can play basketball. You can't.

Janet talks about boys, too. Her brothers are older, and she runs around with them. She talks about brothers Tony and Michael and some other Tony and a Charlie and a Rick and a lot of Tonys and Michaels and Ricks. She plays basketball with all of them.

Last Tuesday you lay back against the hill, the grass just barely beginning to green in the far-between places where it can grow. You listened to Diane, her black hair glowing in the noontime sun. You watched Shirley's gray eyes, her thin-lipped smile. You listened to Janet tell her brothers' dirty jokes, and you wondered who on earth you are.

The hills were good for those two days. Yesterday, though, some of the seventh-grade boys set the hills on fire. It's an April ritual, watching the flames, watching the fire truck roar onto the scene, watching the principal act out his annual springtime rage. At almost exactly the same time each year, he cranks up another tirade and launches into another interrogation to try to find the culprits. Somebody gets suspended for a couple of days, usually the same bunch of boys who on or about March 15 every year put a stink bomb in the ventilating system. But nobody gets all that excited. Everyone is just glad for the diversion. After all, the annual fire does no real harm, just burning off last year's growth, and the hills grow greener for it.

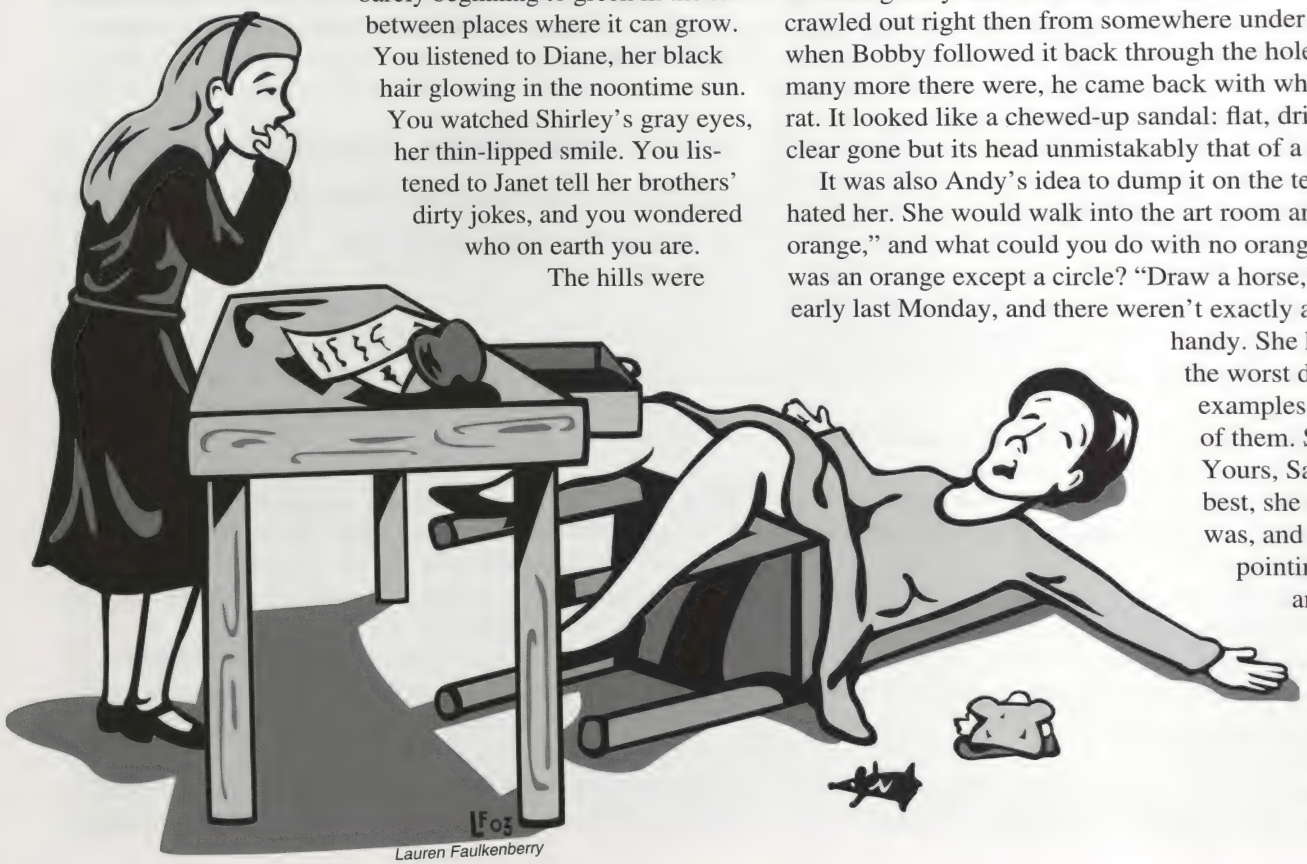
She had opened that drawer right during your art class and, to everyone's utter delight, screamed her bloody head off.

Nobody questions you, for you are, they know, a very good student, and they really don't know who you are.

You don't tell them or your beautiful sister or even your shaggy-haired, snaggletoothed brothers that you were in on the rat escapade. You want to tell everyone, especially Diane, for your accomplices were two good-looking boys. And that is why, of course, you did it.

It was Andy's idea. He and Bobby had stopped at your house, looking for your twin brother, and a brand-new kitten had crawled out right then from somewhere under your porch. And when Bobby followed it back through the hole to find out how many more there were, he came back with what had once been a rat. It looked like a chewed-up sandal: flat, dried out, its tail clear gone but its head unmistakably that of a rat.

It was also Andy's idea to dump it on the teacher. Everybody hated her. She would walk into the art room and say, "Draw an orange," and what could you do with no orange in sight? What was an orange except a circle? "Draw a horse," she had said early last Monday, and there weren't exactly any horse models handy. She had laughed, using the worst drawings as bad examples. Andy's was one of them. So was Bobby's. Yours, Sarah's, was the best, she said, as bad as it was, and she bragged on it, pointing out contours and certain curved lines until you were embarrassed to the point of hot tears. But she didn't even know you were there.



Lauren Faulkenberry

So you did it. You carried the dead rat inside your notebook inside the basket on your old blue bike until you got to school in the morning. Then you turned it over to Bobby who, with Andy, planted it on top of Miss Dunbar's lunch in the drawer of Miss Dunbar's scratched-up oak desk. And she had opened that drawer right during your art class and, to everyone's utter delight, screamed her bloody head off.

Somebody told on Andy and Bobby, and they were put on suspension — three days for incorrigible behavior, their records would say. Their parents never knew. Neither family had a phone, and the principal hadn't bothered beyond his one attempt to call.

They didn't tell on you — why should they? And you did not have to confess. You did try once, you must give yourself credit, to talk to the principal, but he was too busy. He couldn't remember your name anyhow. He just knew from the records that you were a good student.

The whole thing, after all, had been their idea, and your name had never been mentioned. It seems that your name is seldom mentioned anywhere.

It was really a bummer. You couldn't tell anyone how brave you had been, and Andy and Bobby decided to ignore you. They had gotten themselves three glorious days of uncluttered vacation. They had earned it. The whole thing, after all, had been their idea, and your name had never been mentioned. It seems that your name is seldom mentioned anywhere.

Now the phone rings, and you hear your mother answer. "Hello?" she says, and then there's a silence except for your sister's hairbrush and your brothers' scrapping voices. "Sarah?" you hear your mother ask the caller, and your heartbeat increases. "No, she's not here. Call back later." She hangs up.

Your eyes meet your sister's in the mirror. Her brush has stopped for a split second. It starts up again as Amanda shrugs her shoulders. The look in her eyes grows even colder.

Mirrors lie. Sometimes when a test goes exactly right or Andy decides to say hello, you catch sight of yourself in the glass of a bulletin board, and instead of looking as good as you feel, your hair is dull, your skin in splotched, and your shirt collar is wrinkled. You must even smell bad.

Now, though, you peer into the mirror past your sister's blue sweater, and in spite of her and in spite of the phone call, in spite of a whole world of dead rats and dead dreams, you look pretty. You stare.

Then you, whoever you are or may be becoming, turn away and look back out the darkening window. N&T

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A Start of Snow

Soon there will be a scent in the house
like the recesses of old linen closets,
and a breeze that wraps itself around
open doors and slides without moving
through spaces between my fingers,
speaking of the gray whiteness outside.

My parents have told me many times
of carrying me home from the hospital
one morning in late February,
picking their way uphill through
the waves and drifts of snow
crusted underneath with ice.
I want to imagine them singing,
my mother softly as she moves her feet
along the side of the road carefully,
as if each step were an intricate move
in a game only she knows the meaning of,
and my father raising his voice in a tuneless
rendition of "Singing in the Rain."
If I could get the scene just right,
I could make my own history,
tear pages from a notebook and
begin my wanderings.

You see, I'm going back there tomorrow,
for I have missed too much already,
and the wind has shifted while my head was turned.
I should have heard the coyote in Yellowstone
that night many years ago when his howl
filtered plaintively through
the windows of our tent,
and I should have seen Halley's comet
when I stared through the window
of the telescope, supported by the touch
of my father's hand on my shoulders.
Soon, I will feel the breeze that
signals snow as I wrap myself in blankets
and huddle stubbornly by the radio.

— Corinna Byer

Corinna Byer, a native of Cullowhee, N.C., graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in English literature. She is pursuing a master's degree in South Asian studies on a Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship at the University of Texas-Austin. Byer has had work published in the North Carolina Writers' Network Newsletter, North Carolina English Teacher, *and the North Carolina Poetry Society's anthology,* Award-Winning Poems.

Courtesy of Deborah R. Huso

The Taste of Earth

by Deborah R. Huso

A Virginia native finds she can't live without the red clay earth that had bled and nurtured her grandparents.

The winter my grandfather died, I was five years old. I remember how dreamlike it had seemed and how I had stubbornly refused to cry. It was the first time death had touched me.

Days after the funeral, as my grandmother prepared to auction off Grandpa's farm equipment, my dad came to me and gently asked if I'd like one last ride in Grandpa's tractor. I had loved that tractor. An International Harvester, towering and shiny red, its massive wheels made me feel small. But once enclosed inside the cab, sitting securely on Grandpa's knee, I could see the whole world — acre after acre of shimmering summer green corn and rich dark soybeans.

I told Dad, "No."

So he took the tractor for a spin without me, and I never rode in it again.

But there would be other tractors — like Dad's rusty old antique Allis Chalmers, with its precariously extended front wheels that lifted up from the red clay earth when I turned too sharply. How I loved the sound when Dad fired it up and went sailing down the hillside. Sometimes I would ride on Dad's knee; sometimes I would drive, squealing when Dad jumped down onto the plow and left me on my own for the first time.

That tractor opened up the orange soil of the Blue Ridge, the earth that *oozed* between my bare toes whenever I did the tedious chore of weeding around feathery carrot shoots or gathered pea pods and green beans in aluminum pots for summer canning.

That tractor opened up the orange soil of the Blue Ridge, the earth that *oozed* between my bare toes whenever I did the tedious chore of weeding around feathery carrot shoots.

And I watched my mother, like my grandmother before her, set that imposing black canning kettle over the stove, where it boiled like a witch's cauldron, and the Mason jars filled with garden riches clattered against the pressure of the heat. We feasted all winter from the wealth of the open soil. And what we didn't grow, we gathered along the brambled hillsides in our pasture. Sweet blackberries and luscious wild raspberries stained my small fingers as I plucked them. I dropped two in the bucket and two in my mouth as I

Courtesy of Deborah R. Huso

Grandpa hoists Deborah Huso up for a ride on the tractor.

My suburban acquaintances clamored for a taste of the earth they did not know. It took six years of living alongside city interstates for me to appreciate their hunger.

shimmied under fences to steal berries from the neighboring farms.

When I went away to college, my mother sent Mason jars filled with onion-flavored green beans from the garden, sealed cups of frozen sugary strawberries, and little jars of blackberry and peach jam so sweet they made my tongue tickle. No one else had these treasures. And my suburban acquaintances clamored for a taste of the earth they did not know. It took six years of living alongside city interstates and lying awake at night listening to the rumble of tractor trailers instead of the repetitive hum of bull frogs and crickets for me to appreciate their hunger.

And I thought of Grandpa.

I thought of how he carefully plowed the soil each spring after the last of the snow had dissipated, and I thought of Grandma's solid arms rolling out dough into the wee hours and gathering eggs at the first hint of daylight on cool mornings to take into town.

I thought of how they split wide the earth to send my mother and my uncle to college, how even after Grandpa was gone, my grandmother dug into her savings to help put one granddaughter through college, another through vet school. And I thought how insane it was to push and push their descendants from the soil as if it were a menace, and not the bearer of life.

And I thought of Grandma more than two decades after she had sold off Grandpa's tractor, combine, plow, and corn planter, how she clings to the land and the farm, even as her spine crumbles and her solid arms grow weak, how she promises to die on that land before she'll move to town. She is eighty, and she is ruthless and eternal, like the soil that has nurtured her. And try as she would, she could not shake the soil from my parents' hands, any more than she has been able to shake it from my own.

It clings like cockleburs — as does the memory of that day I refused one last ride on Grandpa's tractor. Somehow it hadn't seemed right then — to plod through the soil without him. But now I have left the city behind and returned to the rural landscape of my childhood. And I am trying, acre by acre, to win that moment back and reclaim the land that bled and nurtured my grandparents, raised and educated my parents, and kept its chunky soil forever crusted beneath my fingernails. N&T

Courtesy of Deborah R. Huso

Deborah Huso and her dad ride on an old Allis Chalmers.

Deborah Huso now lives near Warm Springs, Va. She has written travel, history, and culture articles for a variety of magazines and newspapers, including The Washingtonian, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Blue Ridge Country, *and* Appalachian Life.

Under Ground, 1958

At eleven I bury
a pair of Civil War pistols
near the edge of the frozen garden.

I am reading the Classics Comics
"Dante's Inferno." Six months later,
I try to recover the antiques to trade

with Nick for a replica pirate sword.
Pistols wrapped in a red rag
are gone. I am stunned like stone.

Grandma smiles, weeding potatoes,
"The Devil takes everything below ground."
I picture grubby fingers creeping up between

bricks for every nickel dropped on city streets.
Satan does it all. Nothing is too petty
for his vicious attention, she assures us.

Snatching Nick's sword, I stab the yard —
closest I ever came to gardening.
Today I eat no vegetables, imagining

what Lucifer does to dangling carrot tips,
turnip ends pushing into his world.
He is why every garden has a snake.

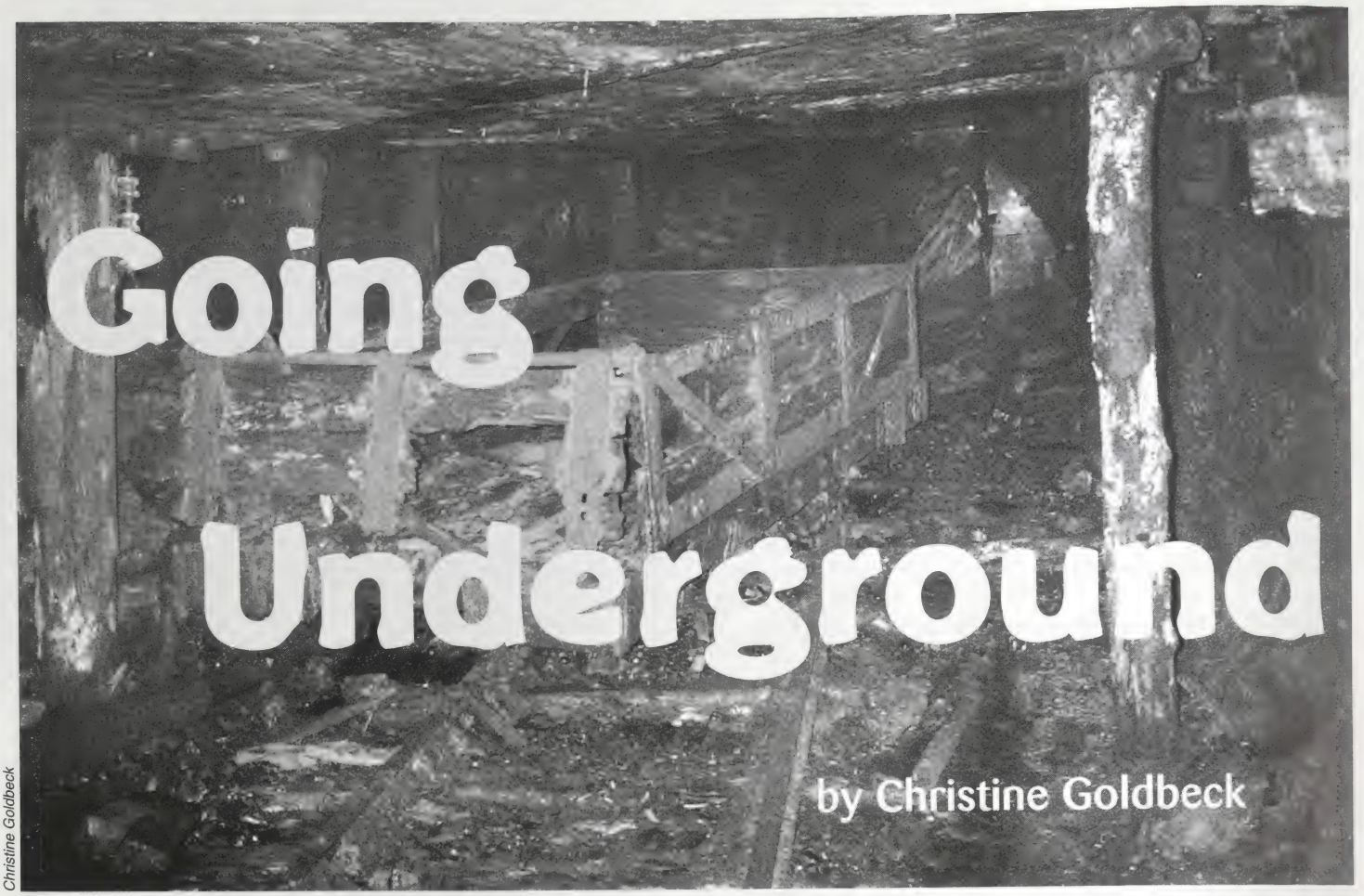
I can't touch soil without feeling
a kind of recoil there, demons
positioning to strike or get away.

The ocean is full of ancient evil things;
chickens peck their own shit in dirt;
some say pigs all are devils,

so I boil beef until it's white, to get the green
and untrustworthy planet out of it.
What was God thinking, dropping us here?

— Ron Houchin

Ron Houchin has poems recently appearing or coming out soon in California Quarterly, New Delta Review, Poet Lore, The Stinging Fly *(Ireland),* Phantasmagoria, Potomac Review, *and* Wind.



Going Underground

by Christine Goldbeck

Christine Goldbeck

Abandoned anthracite mines in Pennsylvania's coalfields attract a group of young adventurers.

A century ago and more, most young men risked their lives in Appalachian Pennsylvania anthracite mines because it was their job. Mining was about the only way to turn a buck back then in the hard coal region. Today, the Underground Miners based in Luzerne County spend their own money to descend into the dark, damp, and largely abandoned underground caverns because they like to do it.

The Underground Miners, nine men and one woman, say the miles of abandoned mines throughout the hard coal region, which fueled America's industrial revolution, intrigue them. They are the great-grandchildren of the men who made labor history in Carbon, Columbia, Dauphin, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Northumberland, and Schuylkill counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Like other coalcrackers, or people indigenous to the anthracite region, they were raised on stories about working in the deep mines. Unlike other coalcrackers, the Underground Miners are not content just to sit back and read about what it was like in there. They want to experience it firsthand. They now know that the smell of old mines is unlike anything they are able to describe, that those mines leave a damp and musty taste in your mouth, and that one stupid move could cost more than they are willing to pay.

The Ghost of an Industry

"I've always been interested in the history of the area, in mining, and in railroads. I thought it was pretty cool how you could walk for miles underground," says Chris Murley, 22, of Lake Winola, Pa., an airplane mechanic by trade. He often flies over the coalfields in his 1960 Cessna 150 to investigate potential abandoned mining sites the group might want to explore.

Squeaking bats and water are about the only audible noises.

History texts, the last of the living deep miners, and current government information available about anthracite mining attest that it is a difficult and dangerous occupation. Coal seams are locked in the folded layers of rock that make up the geology of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The often steep angles of the tunnels and shafts driven into the ground to mine anthracite coal forced miners to crawl up some mine tunnels and down others to get to

the coal. Between 1870 and 1995, there were 31,113 anthracite mining accident deaths recorded, according to Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) statistics.

Some of the mines that the Underground Miners have investigated appear to have been operational one minute and abandoned the next.

The anthracite mining industry is but a glimmer of what it was in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The DEP says Pennsylvania's anthracite production reached its peak in 1917, with the mining of more than 100 million tons of coal. Anthracite mining employment reached its summit in 1914 with almost 181,000 miners. What remains today are the mines, only a few coal breakers, the buildings where coal is broken into usable sizes, and colliery buildings, such as engine houses. Precious few old-time miners are alive; most have succumbed to black lung, or miner's asthma, as it is called in coal country.

The Real Thing

Underground Miner Carissa Kiehart, 19, a web designer from Mayfield, Pa., says she has a fascination with exploring old sites. "The mines and buildings we find have such a great history behind them. I love to just walk through them and wonder what it was like 60 years ago." Kiehart researches old mines and collieries to determine whether the group can access the sites.

Sometimes, there is no plan at all. The group stumbles upon an old mine entrance or colliery relics while off-road riding or hiking. In addition to Murley and Kiehart, the Underground Miners include: Matt Martino, 21, a fireworks technician; Andy Martino, 23, an electronics technician; Mike Kozlowski, 21, a landscaper; J. "Mully" Antosh, 31, a lab technician from Ithaca, N.Y.; Tom Warton, 21, an auto mechanic; Eric Branori, 31, who manufactures aircraft parts; Kris Cerritini, 31, an aircraft mechanic like Murley; and Brian Cohowcz, 31, who works in road construction.

They organized in the fall of 1999 but did not call themselves the Underground Miners until the spring of 2002 when Kiehart and Murley designed the World Wide Web site at http://www.undergroundminers.com. Members of the group, except for Antosh, had been lifelong friends.

Antosh, who found the group through an Internet anthracite discussion group, is the newest member. "I haven't seen any real time underground yet, but I do have a scared kind of anticipation and excitement," he opines. "Most of my initial efforts have been photographing just about anything I can find, such as the one remaining major coal breaker (only one still stands in Schuylkill County: the Saint Nicholas, near Mahanoy City); Centralia, the town devastated by a long-burning underground mine fire; the mine tours; and about anything else anthracite-related."

The Underground Miners mainly tour the northern coalfields, or the collieries and mines in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties. Lately, they have been spending time in the eastern middle fields, in the northern Schuylkill County area. Murley says, "We will actually travel anywhere as long as there are cool things to see."

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg operates a number of official mine tour sites, such as Pioneer Tunnel in Ashland, Schuylkill County, which the Underground Miners recommend for people who want to know what deep mining was like. The tours are great, says Murley. However, for him and his friends, taking a tour is just not as exciting as exploring the real thing as it actually was — before it had been cleaned up and restored.

Old miners have trained the Underground Miners how to enter, move about, and stay alive while they are exploring, and the young people do carry flame safety lamps that detect mine gases as well as small portable oxygen canisters in case they enter a gaseous area.

Water, Gases, and Roof Falls

Old miners have trained the Underground Miners how to enter, move about, and stay alive while they are exploring, and the young people do carry flame safety lamps that detect mine gases as well as small portable oxygen canisters in case they enter a gaseous area. "Yeah, it's dangerous," acknowledges Murley. "But we're also very serious about safety."

Their web site features a huge disclaimer about the dangers of abandoned mines, and they do not recommend that people enter underground mines without equipment and knowledge of

Christine Goldbeck

Andy Martino, Matt Martino, Tom Warton, and Chris Murley head off along the main slope of an abandoned underground coal mine.

the many things that could go wrong while underground. Dangers include water, gases, and roof falls.

"We've been trained by miners to tell what to look for in the ceiling to make sure that it is safe," Murley says. "When they mine the coal, there is slate on top and bottom of the coal vein. The miners usually chip this off the ceiling after they blast the coal down. If they do not, this slate — which can be up to six inches thick — can fall at any time. Slate does not stick all that well to the ceiling, so you must be sure it's gone before you pass underneath it. We never go alone. There's always at least two of us, and someone always knows where we are."

They do not recommend that people enter underground mines without equipment and knowledge of the many things that could go wrong while underground.

Picks, Shovels, and Bones

Some of the mines that the Underground Miners have investigated appear to have been operational one minute and abandoned the next. Rail cars full of coal, picks, shovels, and other hand tools remain in the mines, they explain. "We find lots of stuff. Most of it is rusted, but Chris and Brian got a wheel off a mine car once," Andy Martino says.

"One time, we found this large femur bone," Murley adds. "We don't know what it was from (man or mule), but it was a ways into the mine. That was kind of weird." There are also living creatures such as bats, especially in the winter, Murley says. "We saw a huge rat once, the size of a small cat. That was pretty freaky."

Sounds are rare underground. Old miners and mine reference books both refer to "groaning" timbers, sounds the wooden posts made under the pressure of millions of tons of strata, but Murley says the group does not hear these sounds today. "Most of the timbers are pretty rotten, so their groaning days are gone." Squeaking bats and water are about the only audible noises. "I think we'd probably get scared and leave if we heard something else," Murley quips.

As for walking and moving around, Murley says whether they walk tall or crouch all depends on which mine they are in. "In bigger mines, like the Underwood (located between Scranton and Carbondale), for example, the ceiling in the main slope is about eight feet high. There are rooms with 20-foot ceilings. Bootleg, or illegal, mines on the other hand are pretty small, maybe four feet high in the main slope, or just big enough to get a mine car through."

Murley says he noticed that Martino was breathing hard, which was unusual for him. Martino, meanwhile, chalked it up to years of smoking, and they continued to descend the slope.

At its operational peak, the Underwood employed about 1500 men and boys. The old Pittston Company operated the Underwood from 1930 through 1938; the Pennsylvania Coal Company then ran the Underwood between 1938 and its closing in 1953. When the Underwood's relatively small veins of coal were depleted to the point where it was no longer a cost-effective operation, the mine was doomed.

Christine Goldbeck

Mike Kozlowski stands underground beneath stalactites created from dripping mine drainage.

A Close Call

Despite their training, research, and planning, occasionally the Underground Miners run into a problem while underground. Andy Martino and Chris Murley will never again set foot in the Leighman Slope #179 in Lackawanna County, for example. This decision resulted from a frightening incident that occurred in February 2002.

Murley says he noticed that Martino was breathing hard, which was unusual for him. Martino, meanwhile, chalked it up to years of smoking, and they continued to descend the slope with only their Maglites and Murley's headlight.

"About two steps into the gangway, I noticed that it was getting hard to breathe," Murley recalls. "I told Andy we needed to get out of there fast. We both turned around to head out, and Andy collapsed. When I bent over to help him, I felt like I couldn't get back up."

Martino told Murley he wanted to rest a minute, but Murley said he knew what was happening to them. They had hit a pocket of black damp, or a deadly mixture of carbon dioxide and nitrogen. If they did not get out to fresh air quickly, they would become a permanent part of the mine.

Christine Goldbeck

Chris Murley prepares to enter an abandoned bootleg mine.

"We crawled up the slope, struggling all the way. Our chests felt so heavy. You just couldn't get enough air," Murley explains. When they reached the surface, Murley and Martino sat on the ground, took in great gulps of fresh air, and thought about how lucky they were to get out.

> **"We know this is not a game. That's why we take the time to learn about the mines before we go into them. When we run into water or any sort of problem, we turn around. We want to live to explore another day."**
>
> **– Chris Murley**

"When we got back to Andy's we just lay on his floor for two hours with bad headaches and stomachaches. That was when we really realized how dangerous these abandoned mines are, and that is why we got training in what to look for. We now take the flame safety lamp and oxygen on every underground exploration we go on," Murley says.

A Respectable Job

Beyond safety issues, there are legalities with which the Underground Miners have to concern themselves. They use a legal waiver declaring that they fully understand the risks they take and that mine property owners are not responsible in any way for the actions of the group. Still, sometimes, mine operators refuse admittance to the young people and add strong admonitions against their exploration of any abandoned mine sites for good measure.

"We appreciate the concern, but we know what we're doing, and we agree that we are the ones responsible if anything bad happens," Murley says. "We know this is not a game. That's why we take the time to learn about the mines before we go into them. When we run into water or any sort of problem, we turn around. We want to live to explore another day."

For all they have learned and for as much as they enjoy exploring the mines, the Underground Miners have varying opinions about whether they would have enjoyed life as a miner. "It was a respectable job. Basically, it was all you could do. At least you had a job," says Cohowcz. Murley notes that he would not have enjoyed the work of a miner, but it's not as if there was a lot of work from which to choose. Mining was *the* way of life.

"Let me just say that I have the utmost respect for anyone who has ever worked in a mine. It was a dangerous job, and people were killed in accidents all the time," adds Kiehart. "They did what they had to do to survive. They were heroes." N&T

Christine Goldbeck is editor and publisher at www.minecountry.com. A freelance photojournalist and a published fiction author and poet, she is a graduate student studying digital culture, literature, and hypertext at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vt.

The UN Commission on Refugees: A Radio Report

Q: What do you do for food?

A: We borrow food

I say, *No, no new sneakers this week*
I say to my children, *Because I said so*

Q: Have you ever returned the food that you borrowed?

A: No

I tell my kids, *Because we can't afford them*

Q: What do you do when you don't have food?

A: We drink water to fill our stomachs

and I whisper, *Sweet dreams*

Q: What do you do when you don't have water?

A: We stop crying and start walking
until we see the safe blue trucks

A: We say, *Do you see guns?*

A: We say, *Mama*
or we say, *We have no mama*

or else we have mislaid
our magical voices

so that we speak only
with the worms in our toes

— Penelope Scambly Schott

Penelope Scambly Schott, a frequent contributor to Now & Then, *is the author of* Penelope: The Story of the Half-Scalped Woman *(University Press of Florida, 1999), a narrative poem about an early New Jersey settler. Recipient of four fellowships from the New Jersey State Arts Council, she now lives in Portland, Ore., where she is learning to write about rain.*

Hungry Mother

by Michael Chitwood

It's Monday and the whole period-correct wardrobe thing has finally gotten on my last nerve.

The wardrobe is for Mother's job at The Settlement. She had looked at waitressing and had applied at Hopkins' Department Store, but when The Settlement job came up, she jumped on it.

"A: The money is the same as Hopkins'," she said. "B: It is partially funded with Fed money so it carries some benefits. Benefits are the deciding factor,"

It's Yesteryear six days a week, and I for one am not wholly in favor of that.

she said. "You and I no longer have health insurance now that your dad has split."

"How can they insure that we will be healthy just because you work for the federal government?" I had asked. I'm at the stage where I like asking questions that willfully misunderstand the situation, mother likes to say.

"And besides," Mother had continued, "I don't mind wearing the period-correct wardrobe." "Period-correct wardrobe" were the words that had appeared on the document titled "Terms of Employment," and Mother had taken a liking to them. She had also taken a liking to the wardrobe and had started wearing it around the house after she got off work. It makes me feel like I am living with Laura Ingalls Wilder.

A creation of the local college, The Settlement is a working farm dedicated to showcasing the crafts and practices that allowed Southern Highlanders to prevail, and even thrive, in their beautiful but sometimes difficult environment. The college is a small liberal arts institution founded in the latter part of the 1800s by a Methodist bishop intent on educating the folks in our part of the world, a part of the world that's come to be known as Appalachia. For the first part of the college's existence, it did everything it could to introduce the students to the ways of the world beyond the ridges of the local mountains. That worked pretty well for a while until someone noticed that all the students developed a hankering to see that world for themselves. When they did, they rarely came back to apply their education locally, which is what the bishop had hoped would happen.

Also, at about the same time people noticed this exodus, the world on the other side of the mountains developed a powerful interest in drugs that were not of the medicinal kind and love that was not of the family-oriented kind and music that was not of the church choir kind.

Then it seemed like a good idea to reinforce the ideals that early settlers of this area had brought to the hardscrabble life the mountains afforded, and so The Settlement was created. Most of this was right there in the brochure Mother brought home. Some of it, though—the music and drugs part—was my Grandmother's version. The first time she saw the period-correct wardrobe she called it a get-up.

At The Settlement, the women wear heavy broadcloth dresses while they hoe the gardens and pick pests from the leaves of the vegetable crops, grinding them into the soil with the heels of their brogans.

N.J. Earnest

The men wear homemade trousers and shirts of the same material as they plow and mow and crush sugar cane behind their steady helpmates, the Belgian workhorses. It's Yesteryear six days a week, and I for one — and Grandmother for another — am not wholly in favor of that.

She's taken to looking out the window over the kitchen sink and saying things like, "Signs are that it's going to be a hard winter, child."

When Grandmother named Mother's wardrobe "the get-up," she said, "Well, I'll take convenient over authentic any day. You've got to be sweltering in that dress."

Her first night after work, Mother rehearsed her spiel about frontier life as she fixed our fish sticks and orange mac and cheese. The orange mac and cheese was my favorite, but Dad always said he didn't like eating anything that color. Mother made a lot of that mac and cheese when she was taking courses for her law degree, which she had to give up on when she took the job at The Settlement.

After two weeks at The Settlement, Mother pretty much wears the period-correct wardrobe all the time. I think she takes it off only to hand-wash it in a big tub she found in the garage. I don't know what she wears while washing the dress and bonnet, and I don't want to know. "Land's sake, young 'un" is how she responds to most of the things I say to her. It was funny at first.

She's taken to looking out the window over the kitchen sink and saying things like, "Signs are that it's going to be a hard winter, child. Look how high that hornets' nest is in the oak tree yonder." I don't think Mother knows an oak from a maple.

I threw away all the brochures she had brought home from The Settlement, but Mother already had them memorized. She is particularly fond of the "Hungry Mother" story.

It seems that at one such settlement, Native Americans abducted a woman and child — the brochure was careful not to call them *Indians* — while the man of the house was working in a distant field. The woman was never found, but the child turned up some months later, alone and dazed. It repeated over and over, "Hungry. Mother. Hungry. Mother." The father could never get any more information out of the child about the mother's whereabouts.

Mother is constantly retelling and embellishing the story — she now knows what the mother was doing when she spied the first Native American sneaking through the woods. During one of her story hours, Dad called. He said he wanted to talk to Mother, but she wouldn't go to the phone. She said you could get along fine without modern contrivances such as telephones. She kept saying, "That poor thing, that poor, poor child."

"It's Dad," I said. "You know, former man of the house."

"Poor, poor thing," she said.

"He wants to talk about a settlement," I said. "*A* settlement, not *The* Settlement."

"You want some mac and cheese?" Mother asked. "I feel like some mac and cheese."

I draw the line at wearing my very own period-correct wardrobe that Mother made for me — handmade, she said, though I don't know how else it could be done. When she finished it, she put the trousers and shirt on my bed, arranged as if an invisible boy lay on top of the covers. It spooked me out to look at it, and I tossed them into my closet on top of my shoes. Every day when I come home from school, they are back on the bed, a resting frontier child staring up at the ceiling of my room.

Because The Settlement is open on Saturdays, it is closed on Mondays, Mondays being a slow day in Yesteryear. That means that mother would be home when I got home from school. That's why I get off the bus at Grandmother's house.

"Why it's little Rebecca Boone's boy," Grandmother says when she opens the door for me. "You didn't bring a *bar* ham for your ole granny woman, did you?"

After Grandmother gets me a snack, I blurt, "Mom wears the get-up 24/7. She's talked about building a fire in the backyard to heat the wash water on."

Grandmother turns from where she was arranging some finger sandwiches on a tray for her book club. She comes over

Nancy Jane Earnest

to the table and takes a chair beside me. She picks up one of my cookies and looks at both sides of it, then puts it back on the napkin.

"Sweetheart," she says. Her voice has something different in it, a new flavor, like she had tried coconut in one of her old recipes on a whim. "The people who worked at the real settlement coped with whatever came down the pike. They did the best they could. And they did with what they had. People are still doing that. They cope in different ways. Give your mom some time. She's got a lot of me in her, which means she'll get by. You want some more milk?"

Mother's car is in the driveway when I get home, but she isn't anywhere in the house. I figure she has gone for a walk. She is doing a lot of that lately, which earned me snickers and snipes on the bus. "Your mom trying out for the 1810 Olympics?" Trevor Tipton asked once. Trevor is a lawyer's kid, a tenth grader, two years ahead of me.

Around 6 o'clock, she still isn't back, so I start rummaging in the kitchen. As I look in the cabinets for something to open, I whisper, "Hungry. Mother. Hungry. Mother" to make myself smile. I find a can of Beefy Mac and heat some in the microwave.

At 7:15, I decide to launch a search party. I check through the whole house, even the closets. Then I go out to her car just to make sure she wasn't napping or something in the back seat. I notice that the garage door isn't shut quite all the way to the bottom, so I raise it and go in.

My bike is on its side, and other things look as if they'd been thrown from the shelves. Plastic buckets spill out into the room, and some garden tools lie scattered about.

"Mother?" I say into the dim room.

"Franklin, come here," Mother spits in a fierce whisper. She is huddled in a corner with my sled shielding her. "Quick," she says. "Hide."

I crouch beside her. Her full skirt is bunched around her so that she seems to be sitting on a large calico pillow.

"Did you see them?" she asks

"Them?" I ask back.

"I saw them coming through the woods. They were surrounding the house."

I try to take her hand, but she won't loosen her tight grip on my sled.

"OK," I say. "Look, I'll get the hunting knife." I rise and start for the door, but she gasps.

"Sweetheart, they could still be out there."

"I'll be careful."

I bolt back into the house and grab Dad's hunting knife from the closet in their bedroom. I stop at the door to my room, pause, and then duck in to snatch the homemade shirt from the bed and put it on over my other shirt.

Mother hasn't moved and seems to be shivering.

"Any sign?" she asks.

"No, I think they're gone. We'll wait a bit, then go back inside. I think it will be safe."

I put my hand on her shoulder, and she lowers her chin to her chest.

She snaps it back up suddenly and says, "Oh dear, you must be hungry. You must be starved."

"No, mother, I'm not. I'm not hungry at all. I'm fine. We'll both be fine soon, just fine." N&T

Michael Chitwood's book Gospel Road Going, *a collection of poems paying homage to the Blue Ridge Mountains and their people, was published in 2002.*

The Balcony

The place we saw *Snow White* and all the Disney
greats in rerelease, stale smell and suction
of spilled drinks on the concrete floor, the ancient seats
that creaked each time we squirmed and earned us
pinches more bruising than the belt back at home
but which gave us *Star Wars,* yes *Star Wars,*
which Andy Rietman and I saw twice, the first time
I'd ever tasted such luxury, the way the older boys
went again and again to the same show, like them.
Ironically on the big screen the wires and mattes
were that much less visible, in 1977, and I wanted
more than anything to catch this one from the balcony
whose lip curved out above us, I wanted
to feel suspended in the dark air of that great space
the way Luke hung on the thread of his destiny.
I wanted to lean out against the railing with popcorn
(*You would* drop *it* hissed my mother) in one hand
and a Pepsi in the other, to breathe it all again—
every frame of that brave future—neither accepting
my mother's careful exculpation (*it's not safe*)
nor understanding what it meant to be held separate
by the surfaces of things, to mount those narrow steps
of unvarnished wood without romantic notion,
recent history whose shadow could yet fall
and did each day inside our parents' minds—
strikes at the worsted plant, bomb threats at the school—
what had been science fiction turning documentary
before our eyes, in all the small towns: two boys
racing back into the light, high on sugar, on noble sacrifice,
slashing the thick air with imagined weapons,
laughing and rubbing goosebumps from the pale skins
they've not yet been taught to question or to fear.

—G.C. Waldrep

G.C. Waldrep, a frequent contributor to Now & Then, *has work in recent issues of* Poetry, The Gettysburg Review, Ascent, Many Mountains Moving, *and other journals. His nonfiction book,* Southern Workers and the Search for Community, *is available from University of Illinois Press.*

Reaching Kids Where They Live

Appalachian Artist and Storyteller Paul Brett Johnson

by Marianne Worthington

Through vivid illustrations and words, a Kentucky native brings Appalachian tales to a whole new audience of youngsters.

Paul Brett Johnson majored in education in college because his family convinced him he needed something to fall back on in case his dream of being an artist fell through. During his first job as a school art teacher in Dade County, Fla., he knew immediately that the structure and discipline of the educational system did not suit him. "I used up all my sick leave before Christmas," Johnson recalls wryly.

Today, Paul Brett Johnson works successfully as a children's book author and illustrator, having escaped the rigor imposed by school boards. From his spacious studio located on the top floor of his Victorian home in downtown Lexington, Ky., Johnson has written and illustrated a dozen of his own books, including his *Jack Outwits the Giants,* published in 2002. In addition, he has provided illustrations for nine other children's books, including George Ella Lyon's *A Traveling Cat* and James Still's *An Appalachian Mother Goose* and *Sporty Creek.*

Drawing on His Roots

Johnson often draws on his Appalachian roots for inspiration in crafting his stories and illustrations. His mother and father were Knott County, Ky., natives, and Johnson was raised in the small community of Mousie, near Hindman. His maternal grandfather was a grand storyteller who often used the fantastic in his tales. Johnson recalls, "You could never be sure he was telling the truth when you listened to his stories." His mother and her three sisters all became librarians, and his library science teacher at Hindman High School was James Still.

Exposed to the oral and written tradition of storytelling from an early age, Johnson also knew early on that he had a predilection for art. He says he always felt an "urgency" to be an artist. His parents supported him by providing private art lessons at

> All of Johnson's books are linked through his use of laugh-out-loud humor, beautifully rendered regional settings, and wise and sympathetic animals. The stories all have subtle and indirect psychological underpinnings and are presented from a child's perspective.

Alice Lloyd College in Pippa Passes, Ky., while he was in middle and high school. There he studied drawing, sculpture, clay, and watercolor.

At the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Johnson majored in art education and then earned a master's degree in special

education in 1970 with the notion of going into art therapy. But he could not long ignore that urgent calling he felt to be an artist. After a few detours, first as an elementary school art teacher, then as a graphics designer at the Jenny Wiley Playhouse in Prestonsburg, Ky., Johnson moved back to Lexington. Living with his brother, he bought a darkroom and tried freelance photography for a while, occasionally supplementing his income with substitute teaching. As he began to try to make a living as an artist in the early 1970s, his first efforts at writing and illustrating children's picture books were rejected.

Johnson then began researching the children's book market, reading about writing for children, and studying successful children's books. In 1993, he sold his first book, *The Cow Who Wouldn't Come Down,* to New York-based Orchard Books. Hailed by *School Library Journal* as "a virtuoso debut," *The Cow Who Wouldn't Come Down* won a 1993 Blue Ribbon by *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* as well as the American Bookseller Kids' Pick of the Lists, *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and Kentucky Bluegrass awards.

Judith Victoria Hensley

Paul Brett Johnson

A Growing List of Books and Awards

The Cow Who Wouldn't Come Down introduced readers to Miss Rosemary, a mountain farmer who lives with her flying cow, Gertrude; Miss Rosemary's pig, George; and her goose, Magnolia. Miss Rosemary is based on Johnson's Appalachian grandmothers. "She looks like one and acts like the other," says Johnson. With the sequels *The Pig Who Ran a Red Light* and *The Goose Who Went Off in a Huff,* the artist now has a trio of books about Miss Rosemary and her precocious farm animals.

> *The Cow Who Wouldn't Come Down* introduced readers to Miss Rosemary, who is based on Johnson's Appalachian grandmothers. "She looks like one and acts like the other," says Johnson.

Since 1993, Johnson has continued to win awards for his books, including prizes from the Children's Book Council Children's Choice Awards, the *School Library Journal, Smithsonian Magazine,* and the California Young Readers Medal. Several of his books have appeared on the New York Public Library's "100 Titles for Reading and Sharing" list.

More recently, Johnson has focused on reviving traditional Appalachian folktales, though he believes that genre may currently be stalled. "Editors are not buying folktales at the moment," he says. The Kentucky author has published four books in the Appalachian folk story tradition: *Old Dry Frye: A Deliciously Funny Tall Tale* (perhaps his funniest book); *Bearhide and Crow,* about the swappin' fool Amos Dyer; and two Jack Tales, *Fearless Jack* and *Jack Outwits the Giants.* Johnson says that because the Appalachian oral tradition was like second nature to him, it was easy to write, illustrate, and adapt these stories as picture books.

From the Perspective of a Child

Regardless of the subject matter, all of Johnson's books are linked through his use of laugh-out-loud humor, beautifully rendered regional settings, and wise and sympathetic animals who often have starring roles. The stories all have subtle and indirect psychological underpinnings and are presented from a child's perspective. Johnson, like his books, is good-humored, witty, wise, but modest about his own success. "I don't know why my books sell," he says. "I'm amazed."

His writing philosophy centers on understanding a child's

From OLD DRY FRYE: A DELICIOUSLY FUNNY TALL TALE by Paul Brett Johnson. Copyright © 1999 by Paul Brett Johnson. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Scholastic, Inc.

Old Dry Frye: A Deliciously Funny Tall Tale **is based on a traditional Appalachian folktale, a genre that Paul Brett Johnson often turns to when selecting a story to illustrate.**

experiential field. He believes in "reaching kids where they live," often writing *for* children instead of writing *about* children. Johnson strives to simplify without being simplistic and says he hopes his books will help children "become aware of their emerging selves."

One of his most memorable reading experiences as a child was reading Munro Leaf's *The Story of Ferdinand,* the classic tale of the peace-loving, flower-sniffing bull. Johnson says he related to Ferdinand because the bull was not what people expected him to be. By today's standards, Johnson admits, the writing in *Ferdinand* is too didactic and the moral too obvious, but Ferdinand's unconventional qualities influenced Johnson's own writing and illustrating efforts.

His versatile talents as an illustrator range from panoramic but richly detailed landscapes to comic animals with nearly human behaviors and expressions to energetic, colorful acrylics paired with deft pencil drawings.

Despite his aversion to making a living as a full-time teacher, the author visits approximately 25 elementary schools each year, specializing in workshops for the fourth-grade writing portfolios now mandated by the Kentucky public school system. He combines role-playing and free association types of games as well as the processes involved in creating a book in the hopes of "reaching a kid or two with talent in writing and art. I want to help them believe in the merit of their efforts," says Johnson.

From OLD DRY FRYE: A DELICIOUSLY FUNNY TALL TALE by Paul Brett Johnson. Copyright © 1999 by Paul Brett Johnson. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Scholastic, Inc.

Johnson is inspired by the Impressionist painters and feels even his cartoon-like drawings should be "painterly."

From MR. PERSNICKETY AND CAT LADY by Paul Brett Johnson. Published by Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic, Inc. Copyright © 2000 by Paul Brett Johnson. Used by permission.

Johnson's illustrations are often cartoon-like, as in this rendering for *Mr. Persnickety and Cat Lady,* a story about feuding neighbors.

His newly launched web site (www.paulbrettjohnson.com) is designed from a child's point of view, offering his biography in a question-and-answer format as if children were asking the questions. ("Are you rich?" and "Do you have a real job?" are among the questions that yield the most revealing answers.)

Keeping It "Painterly"

Sometimes Johnson's illustrations are cartoon-like, as in his book about feuding neighbors, *Mr. Persnickety and Cat Lady,* or in his version of a traditional Russian tale, *A Perfect Pork Stew.* Other times, the illustrations are realistic, as in the story of a farm family in *Farmers' Market* or of a pet beagle lost in the desert in *Lost.*

Inspired by the Impressionist painters, Johnson is serious about his artistic endeavors. He believes that all of his illustrations, even if they are cartoons, should be "painterly—they must be viable and should stand on their own as pieces of art." This principle is obvious in his eclectic artistic style. His versatile talents as an illustrator range from panoramic but richly detailed landscapes to comic animals with nearly human behaviors and expressions to energetic, colorful acrylics paired with deft pencil drawings.

From MR. PERSNICKETY AND CAT LADY by Paul Brett Johnson. Published by Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic, Inc. Copyright © 2000 by Paul Brett Johnson. Used by permission.

Johnson's next book, a hilarious take on the nursery song "Little Bunny Foo Foo," will be published in the spring of 2004. Typical of Johnson's amusing and surprising style, the fairy godmother in this rollicking tale is a tutu-wearing possum.

At present he is awaiting the publication of Kathi Appelt's newest picture book, *The Best Kind of Gift,* for which he provided illustrations. He is also one of the jurors for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators' annual Golden Kite Award, the only award presented to children's book authors and artists by their fellow authors and artists. Johnson must choose the best three books from the approximately 700 entries in the picture book category.

Paul Brett Johnson is content with his dream-come-true status as a freelance artist and children's book writer and illustrator and has no immediate plans to venture into other markets, though he might consider writing children's beginning novels in the future. Although he believes that Appalachian folktales are not a hot market item at present, he has three traditional Appalachian stories under consideration with his current publisher, including "Jack and the Talking Mule Hide," based on Richard Chase's version of the Jack Tale called "Jack and the Heifer Hide." Johnson's innate talent for mountain storytelling and his skill as an artist may help preserve these often forgotten and fast-vanishing Appalachian treasures for another generation. NaT

Marianne Worthington is reviews editor for Now & Then. *The first Paul Brett Johnson book she read was* Old Dry Frye, *and she hasn't stopped laughing since.*

Review

Jack Outwits the Giants
illustrated and adapted by Paul Brett Johnson

Margaret K. McElderry Books
Simon & Schuster
New York - 2002
$16.00 (hardcover)

If you think Jack's giant troubles ended when he chopped down the beanstalk, Paul Brett Johnson has news for you. In *Jack Outwits the Giants,* he recounts another old tale about Jack's adventures with the world's larger human inhabitants.

Students and longtime practitioners of Appalachian folklore recognize hundreds of Jack Tales, the American version of the boy-hero fairy tales brought over in the 18th century by European settlers. Johnson earlier adapted another Jack Tale to create *Fearless Jack,* a book that was named one of the New York Public Library's "100 Titles for Reading and Sharing." Johnson's fans can look forward to a third Jack Tale, his current project.

This time around, Jack is caught in a bad storm, a rain so heavy "the sky [is] pouring out a waterfall." When he takes refuge in a farmhouse, he meets up with a giant-woman "tall as a barn loft." Her husband, who soon appears, is not only the "biggest, wildest-looking human being Jack ever did see," but to make matters worse, he has two heads, and both of them are "mud-fence ugly."

Unfortunately for Jack, it's been awhile since the giant feasted on meat, and all the old woman has to offer him for dinner is some cornmeal mush. Now Jack may appear from the outside to be a little slow, but he's sharp enough to see right through an invitation to stay overnight and hang around for breakfast.

Sure enough, later that night, the giant pokes both heads up into the loft where Jack is sleeping. Seeing what he thinks is the snoozing body of Jack, he whomps the bundle right properly with his big club. Jack, who has rigged a sack of feed to look like a sleeping boy, bounds down from the loft the next morning "keen as a sapling," causing "both of that giant-man's mouths [to drop] wide open and the giant-woman [to look] like she had just seen a haint."

Fearing Jack has been witched, but nevertheless unwilling to turn loose of a potential meal, the giant sets Jack some tests. In the time-honored tradition of folktales, there are three, each one a little more difficult than the one before. Jack, though a boy of middlin' size, uses his wits to pass all but the last impossible test. However, he finds a way around even that seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

The illustrations enrich the text with a giant clad in pink-and-green-checkered trousers, his fingernails a coordinated shade of green. Like every country boy's pet, Jack's faithful hound dog, though never mentioned in the text, stays close at hand, his expressive face testimony to Jack's travails. How Jack outwits one more set of hungry giants makes entertaining reading not only for the young, elementary school-aged audience Johnson targets, but also for everyone who enjoys a good tale told with humor and respect for tradition.

—Connie Jordan Green

Connie Jordan Green is a poet, newspaper columnist, and award-winning children's author. She has taught writing classes at the University of Tennessee and teaches for community groups.

The Circumstance of Death

by Barbara Smith

Mountain State Press
Charleston, W.Va. - 2001
$12.50 (paper)

Sophronia Stennet dies in a prison infirmary after confessing to the murder of her son Dempsey, whom she kept in a cage on the porch. Her daughter Rowena listens to her mother's taped confession, horrified as much at the details of her mother's harrowing life as she is with Dempsey's murder. Rowena is determined to give her mother a decent funeral and to reunite all the Stennet dead in one burial plot.

To do this, she must find the graves of her twin sisters, dead of starvation at age seven; her father's grave somewhere on the family farm; and Dempsey's missing body. Rowena has not seen her brothers, Thurmond and Rodney, since the three of them were taken from Sophronia and placed in foster care as children. Through county records, she is able to locate them, as well as her Aunt Nonna and Uncle Theodore, and she asks for their help.

The history of this ill-begotten family is then revealed through the shared memories and internal musings of its remaining members during the family reunion that takes place at Sophronia's funeral. It's a history of epic tragedy going back three generations. Each family member tries to understand and make peace with the past and to go on with the lives they've managed to forge despite it. Some will retreat into the denial that so far has sustained them. Others will discover seeds of strength and love that, with less deprivation, might well have resulted in an entirely different family history. That strength and love may account in part for the family members who have turned out to be decent human beings.

This is a big story that at times threatens to burst the confines of the book's spare 212 pages. Readers unfamiliar with the region may find the characters in *Circumstance* overblown. But Smith refuses to compromise the authenticity of their voices, and it is a credit to her deft characterizations that she compels us all, believers and nonbelievers alike, to listen. First, she makes us curious: Rodney throws Rowena out when she first appears but then goes out and tries to right things in his own way. Then Smith makes us care: The self-appointed family truth-teller, Rodney, is forced to confront the deepest truth about himself — that he fiercely loved his mother and that what he perceived as her abandonment had broken his heart.

The characters in *Circumstance of Death* have a lot to say about the institutions that govern our lives: government, business, religion, and social workers, to name just a few. With scathing, often hilarious pronouncements, they take swipes at them all. For example, they offer their take on pastors and religion: "He's one of those bastards who get paid for doing nothing but scaring the shit out of people once or twice a week, with or without snakes."

As Rowena, Rodney, and their uncle Theodore gather the dead and solve the mystery of Dempsey, they begin to forge a family bond built on the truth they find in their shared recollections. Rowena's teenage children are drawn into this process and begin to seek their own places in the history and future of their newly constituted family. You sense that this family will endure.

The Circumstance of Death is a compelling read, often unsettling in its searing detail, but the hope and courage of a family struggling toward light haunts the reader. It begins with a snapshot, as though a still photographer has captured a repellent but fascinating image in one click of the shutter at just that time, in just that juxtaposition of character and scene, oddity and pathos, to make it so compelling it cannot be ignored. And so we look for a moment longer. And we keep looking, and at some point we realize that we've walked into the snapshot and are living the lives behind the image. *Circumstance* takes us beyond stereotype to the truth that gave rise to it, a truth that deserves to be told.

— Genie Jacobson

Genie Jacobson is a freelance writer and editor and living in Irvine, Calif. She recently published a memoir about her cousin, the Appalachian poet, teacher, and editor Albert Stewart in Crossing Troublesome: 25 Years of the Appalachian Writers Workshop.

Rooster Creek Girl Runs Away

by Shawna Lee Hopkins

Adams Press
Chicago - 2002
$8.95 (paper)

Some years ago, I was both shocked and perversely amused at the teasing words of an undergraduate bard in the first, and perhaps the only, edition of a certain Eastern Kentucky college's literary magazine: "Hey, Jesse Stuart — how about laying some REAL words on us, huh?"

Maybe the cocky young poet intended to shock his readers by hyperbole, without meaning any real disrespect to Stuart or his memory. But even if this were not the case, the point he was trying to make is valid. So much Appalachian literature is based either on memoir or on its fictional equivalents — that is, settings and themes from 40 or more years ago or modern-day caricatures of those same settings and themes. Young Appalachian men and women often have difficulty finding any of their own life experiences reflected in such works. Although such modern authors as Silas House and Denise Giardina have indeed supplied worthy input to Appalachian literature, a significant corpus of literary work with themes with which Generation X — and Y — Appalachians can fully identify has yet to be developed. Such a body of work is absolutely necessary if Appalachian literature is to survive as a literary force.

Rooster Creek Girl Runs Away, a novella by newcomer Shawna Lee Hopkins of Pike County, Ky., represents a refreshing — and occasionally disturbing and provocative — change in direction. Set in a fictional community in Hopkins' native Pike County at any time roughly between 1980 and the day before yesterday, *Rooster Creek* is the first-person narrative of 14-year-old Emily Sue Justice and her yearlong adventures and misadventures. She is engaged in a sometimes humorous, more often touching attempt to earn and save enough money to run away from a home headed by a father "who would rather be back on Rooster Creek picking up pop cans than in a big city with a real job." The story has more than one adult

theme, and Hopkins herself gives it the equivalent of a PG-13 rating.

On one level, *Rooster Creek Girl Runs Away* can be enjoyed by late adolescents or adults simply as a local color coming-of-age romance. But school, friends, that special boy, and the sweet dream of a better life beyond the hills are not all that either Hopkins or her young heroine have on their minds. It is only by delicate degrees that the author skillfully demonstrates that the only truly romantic element in the story is Emily's own teenage perceptions of herself and her environment — perceptions that are innocent, shallow, but gradually deepen. By using only Emily's vantage point, Hopkins craftily uses an adolescent's characteristic lack of discernment when dealing with the novel's adult themes.

For example, an adult theme addressed by Hopkins with almost harsh realism is found in the story of Emily's unfortunate best friend, Jenna Park. Jenna's Uncle Cline has been arrested because, as Emily's mother reports, "I take it he was with an underage girl." Emily doesn't quite catch on. "I didn't know that was against the law," she responds. After her mother explains obscurely, "It's the law that says you have to be a decent human being or at least act like one," she forbids her daughter from being friends with Jenna. "Don't tell her I said so, but I don't think it's a good idea for either of you," her mother says.

Emily's naive viewpoint presents us with a cruelly accurate depiction of a small rural, traditional Appalachian community's response to an evil that is not supposed to exist. Emily's position within her family, her school, and her community thus makes her something of an adolescent version of James Still's narrator in *River of Earth,* a female version of Jesse Stuart's Sid Tussie in *Taps for Private Tussie,* and a modern rendering of both.

Emily's — and Jenna's — story ends on a wistful rather than on a truly happy note, with many of its conflicts only partially and perhaps merely temporarily resolved. It is thus made all the more poignant — and realistic. By the book's end, Emily has a different concept of running away than she had a year earlier at the story's beginning — and therein lies the true note of hope.

Rooster Creek Girl Runs Away is a promising literary start, both for Emily Justice and for her creator. With a little luck, and with Hopkins' planned sequel, Emily will be going places yet.

— John Sparks

John Sparks is a religious historian and writer and an ordained minister of the United Baptist Church. Now living in Offutt, Ky., he is the author of The Roots of Appalachian Christianity: The Life and Legacy of Elder Shubal Stearns, reviewed on p. 39.

The Last Girls
by Lee Smith
Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, N.C. - 2002
$24.95 (hardcover)

Ernest Hemingway said that all modern American literature came from it, lots of English majors think about it, women in the 19th century couldn't have risked it, but novelist Lee Smith actually did it. Then she turned the experience into *The Last Girls.*

In 1966, inspired by Mark Twain's classic *Huckleberry Finn,* Smith and 15 classmates at Roanoke, Va.'s Hollins College constructed a raft and floated down the Mississippi River. This experience becomes the basis for her new novel. However, idyllic experiences such as floating down the river, working on tans, writing haphazardly at novels, and subsisting on doughnuts and tuna fish are only the beginning of *The Last Girls.* As readers follow four middle-aged women and the ashes of a fifth down the Mighty Mississippi from Paducah, Ky., to New Orleans 30 plus years later, they are likely to discover that as the story eddies along, it becomes as deep and complex as the river itself.

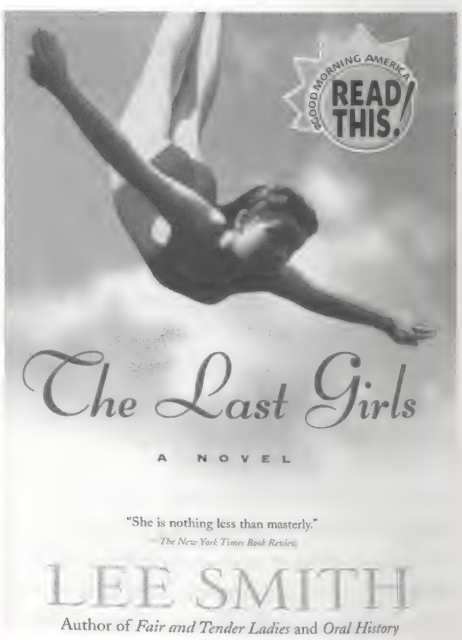
As the journey begins, the remaining members of a group of once-inspired English majors from the fictional Mary Scott College, the "last girls," reluctantly reassemble at the request of the late Margaret "Baby" Ballou to scatter her ashes just north of New Orleans.

At first, these old school pals may seem like an odd, if delightful, collection of Southern personalities drifting along on the *Belle of Natchez.* First, of course, is Baby herself, the once outrageous, talented, and haunted free spirit with rapacious appetites for literature, men, and bad habits.

Harriet — despite her reputation in college as "the most responsible English major" as well as being Baby's former roommate — now "feels like a caricature [of] the old maid in the deck of Old Maid cards." No wonder, then, that Harriet is made nervous by Courtney, a poster socialite for *Southern Living* who left college before graduation to marry. Courtney's old roommate, Anna, has turned her turbulent childhood and coalfield smarts into a stunning career as a writer, with 34 formulaic romances in her canon.

In contrast, down-to-earth Catherine has a satisfying career in yard art after years of trying to move beyond her aristocratic Southern background and her several failed marriages. At first, Catherine seems the happiest, perhaps because she appears totally unselfconscious, perhaps because she has fewer literary pretenses than the others, perhaps because she is happily married — mostly — and has brought her current husband along for the ride.

The Last Girls contains portraits of significant male characters as well, and they lend depth to Smith's narrative. For example, one of the most well-developed male characters in all of Smith's fiction is Russell Hurt, who is not the sort of husband Catherine's old friends would have


GOOD MORNING AMERICA
READ THIS.
The Last Girls
A NOVEL
"She is nothing less than masterly."
The New York Times Book Review
LEE SMITH
Author of Fair and Tender Ladies and Oral History
Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill

expected. He's easy to love with his Weather Channel fanaticism and stock comeback reply to any conflict: "'You may be right.'"

Quirky moments abound as the characters drift downstream, become reacquainted, and reflect on such vagaries of old age as taking estrogen. However, only to note the fun and then lay the book aside is about as satisfying as studying the Mississippi through a porthole.

In fact, *The Last Girls* offers much more than a 21st-century frolic reminiscent of *Huckleberry Finn.* As the major characters recall their college relationship with Baby Ballou, the novel becomes an opportunity for readers not only to discover more about the characters than the characters themselves wish to reveal but also to observe the swirling currents of past and present and the power of storytelling, one of Smith's favorite themes.

"We've all got our little histories, haven't we?" Anna observes, even as she tries to replace her own narrative with stories she can control via linear formulas and predictable endings. Courtney just as futilely tries to bring control to chaos with scrapbooks filled with carefully composed photographs.

Indeed, "that twit Harriet" is the only one courageous, honest, silly, or insightful enough to try to find the often multiple truths buried in the fragmented, hidden histories of the others and, ultimately, lodged within herself. Thus, she emerges as the main character of the novel. She knows best, has loved most, and still guiltily edits the memory of the late Baby Ballou. Harriet is the best reader among the "last girls," regardless of whether the plot is the linear *Huckleberry Finn* or the convoluted behavior around her. "There are more ways to tell stories than she could ever have dreamed," she realizes.

Harriet's support and willingness to be an audience empowers the expression of many of the characters. They range from the women returning to school in the COMEBACK! Program to the man known as the "Riverlorian" — who can so easily tell the river's story but has such difficulty telling his own — to Baby herself. No wonder Baby leaves the Sylvia Plathian poems written during the rafting trip for Harriet to peruse and puzzle over much later. And no wonder Smith allows Harriet (the character most like herself, Smith admits in an interview) to articulate a theme that has continually fascinated Smith: "It's always the story-teller's story."

Even more events, more characters, and more possibilities are suggested as the *Belle of Natchez* pulls into New Orleans. The broadness of the ending of *The Last Girls* demonstrates Lee Smith's assertion in her *Algonkian* article, "Same River Twice," that "the linear, beginning-middle-end form of plot doesn't fit the lives of any women I know."

Smith relates how once a tipsy middle-aged book club member asked her, "Why don't you write about us?" Indeed, we as readers will find a sense of "us," a sense of journey every bit as satisfying as a traditional plot with a tidy final ending. *The Last Girls* succeeds not because it follows the path of an old classic but because it plumbs the depths of reading, writing, and that river called life.

— Kathy Griffith Fish

Kathy Griffith Fish crossed that mighty artery, the Mississippi River, 19 years ago when she left her native Midwest to teach English at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky. She has taught Lee Smith's work in a women's literature course, directed an undergraduate thesis on Smith's theme of storytelling, and interviewed the author for a local television program when Smith came to Cumberland to inaugurate the College's Palmer Lecture Series.

Gina.Jamie.Father.Bear
by George Ella Lyon
Atheneum/Simon & Schuster
New York, N.Y. - 2002
$15.95 (hardcover)

George Ella Lyon is well-known as a premier wordcrafter of Appalachian poetry, fiction, and children's books. *Gina. Jamie.Father.Bear* demonstrates that she is also a premier storycrafter. Though marketed as a children's book, this novel is an ingenious blend of contemporary realism and classic myth, a magical and archetypal piece of artistry that will be as attractive to adults as to children.

Lyon has previously written time-shift fantasy (for example, her 1994 novel *Here and Then)*, and she frequently explores metaphysical questions, as in her 1992 picture book *Who Came Down That Road?* and in "Crossing," a poem included in her 1993 collection, *Catalpa.* So the melding of times, places, and lives is not new to her.

But there *is* something new and fresh in the interwoven stories of two motherless families in two parallel centuries and settings that eventually converge. The stories are told in alternating chapters. Their convergence heals and frees both families — leaving one thread, one circle.

In present-day Cleveland, Gina lives with her brother, Marty, and her father, Dr. Ourisman, who is a surgeon. Since his divorce, he has become distracted, and unfocused, and he leaves every morning at the crack of dawn. Gina suspects that he does not always go to the hospital. In another century and another place, Jamie lives with his father, whom he calls "Da," and two sisters, Anadel and Lily, in a stone cottage with a mountain at its backdoor. Da disappears every morning, and Jamie knows that he does not always go to Bridestowe, where he sells his herbal cures.

When Gina and Jamie surreptitiously follow their fathers to learn their secrets, they find magic and mystery. Gina finds that her father visits a red-haired psychic in her purple kitchen; Jamie learns that his father transforms into a white bear and crosses the River Tavy, a boundary Jamie is forbidden to cross.

Eventually Gina and Jamie meet in a place and time in between contemporary Cleveland and ancient Bridestowe. Gina refers to this convergence as a "soul journey," mysteriously facilitated by her grandmother's wedding ring, which her grandfather bought in a pawnshop because they were too poor to afford a new ring. Lyon's story demonstrates that objects, like people, drift in and out of the patterns of story and life, connecting us to other people, worlds, and times in a magic circle.

In fashioning this dual tale, Lyon has "dipped her ladle into the cauldron of story" — to borrow a phrase from J.R.R. Tolkien's famous 1947 essay, "On Fairy-Stories" — and pulled up a classic motif as old as Cupid and Psyche or King Arthur and Sir Gawain. She lends a new shape to an old folktale pattern that is best known in the tales of "Beauty and the Beast,"

"East of the Sun and West of the Moon," "The Black Bull of Norroway," and the Appalachian variant "Whitebear Whittington." In these classic stories, a man is cursed to take on beastly or animal form until the love of a woman breaks the spell.

By joining this old pattern with a contemporary story line, Lyon validates myths and folktales for modern life. Children will wonder, "What is it like to have a bear-man for a father?" She causes the reader to ask the question, "What does it mean to be half-man and half-beast in the modern world?"

Lyon's most significant twist on the old story pattern is that the agent of disenchantment is a child, not an adult. In Lyon's story, the children free the adults from guilt, from the past, from their beastly selves. Children's literature reminds us that adults sometimes abdicate their responsibilities, leaving the children to pick up the slack. In fiction and in real life, children often assume adult roles and initiate the action necessary to redeem adults from their beastliness.

Gina.Jamie.Father.Bear is ultimately a story about circles — rings, cycles of myth, cycles of life. The novel affirms that, try as we might to force life into the straight-and-narrow, linear model, it will curve back on itself, surprising us by delivering up the past in fresh, new iterations. Sometimes an action in the present can free someone long dead from an ancient curse. People go on being people even when they are dead, and freeing the past also liberates the present. Life is more nearly a state of "in-between" than a clearly focused here-and-now.

Can children understand this concept? Absolutely. Children understand the "between" worlds of monsters and magic and myth better than adults do. *Gina. Jamie.Father.Bear* encourages us to be less certain of linear assumptions and more accepting of circular possibilities.

— Roberta T. Herrin

A native Appalachian, Roberta T. Herrin is an English professor at East Tennessee State University, where she teaches Appalachian and children's literature. Her essay, "From Poetry to Picture Books: The Words of George Ella Lyon," recently appeared in Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Women's Poetry, *edited by Felicia Mitchell.*

Hollow Ground
by Stephen Marion
Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, N.C. - 2002
$23.95 (hardcover)

"On the night the earth collapsed, Moody Myers rode him home." With *Hollow Ground's* strange and wonderful beginning, Stephen Marion unveils a fictional universe where "mystery" and "manners" reside and collide. Southern writer Flannery O'Connor insisted that the tension between these elements is what makes good fiction. Indeed, she drew her theory from the realities of lived experience: how the particularity of place and character, the man-made forms and codes try to contain and explain the tyrannous certainty of loss and death and suffering.

Like O'Connor's Georgia, Marion's East Tennessee is made up of recognizable small-town sites, rituals, people and speech that are somehow heightened, intensified, and magnified. This literary landscape is a place of mystery and wonder partly because its setting — Alexander City, Tennessee — is literally at risk of disappearing, of being swallowed up. Formerly called Zinctown, Alexander City sits on top of what had been the largest zinc deposit in the world and was in the process of subsiding into the old mine.

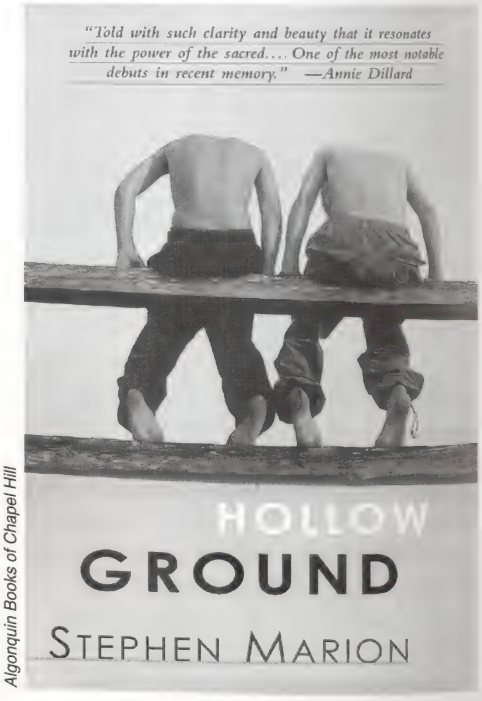
With his slipping, sinking town precariously perched on "hollow ground," Marion finds a perfect metaphor for the human condition — mutable, mortal, and resilient in its fierce resistance to time and decay. The presence of mystery and manners is manifest in tensions between what endures and what disappears; between ephemeral human institutions — school, church, law, family — and primeval design; between popular culture and historical memory; between natural law and human impulse; between ancient landmarks and temporary arrangements.

Ironically evoking Mark Twain's Southern river world of natural wonders and human follies, of lost boys and absent fathers, *Hollow Ground* magically combines the high spirits and romantic fantasies of a modern day Tom Sawyer with the elusive quest and dark discoveries of Huckleberry Finn. This is clearly 14-year-old Taft Defaro's book, and he earns his place in a literary pantheon of memorable American boys.

Taft is the illegitimate son of Brenda Defaro and her former lover, Gary Solomon, who had left her and Alexander County first for Vietnam and then for big-city law enforcement before the boy was born. When Solomon inherits his Great-Aunt Una Clay's house, he returns to his hometown.

Taft is that wonderful being rarely seen in contemporary fiction: a thoughtful, sensitive, and absolutely believable teenager. He doesn't much like Sunday School or his mother's selective memory or bearing his dead stepfather's last name. But he does like being in love with precocious Tanya Mayes, who leaves comic and cryptic letters under a rock in his backyard; admiring his reckless Uncle Tony racing his motorcycle or Corvette past the school bus every day; or contemplating giant sinkholes with his step-grandfather, former mining engineer and amateur anthropologist Moody Myers.

But this is no simple coming-of-age story despite Taft's desire to know himself, his place, and his people because this boy is looking for more than love or acceptance or father or identity. He is


"Told with such clarity and beauty that it resonates with the power of the sacred... One of the most notable debuts in recent memory." —Annie Dillard
HOLLOW
GROUND
STEPHEN MARION
Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill

trying to measure his small life against the content and burden of all cosmic human history, which he finds embodied in his own family and hometown. Taft comes to realize that a person is a wondrous repository of inescapable genetic and historical forces. He seems to understand instinctively the collision between mystery and manners that takes place at the crossroads of the human heart.

Hollow Ground is not the kind of book you read through for a story with a formulaic plot line and predictable characters who suffer and redeem themselves through family love and traditional values. This story won't appeal to book club members who like local color because Marion's book is real literature about real people in real dilemmas. The novelist undercuts narrative expectations and resolutions — while skillfully alluding to a host of literary myths and images — because there are no simple explanations and resolutions, perhaps none at all, for the circumstances of lives on this planet.

A perilous place of human passion (abandonment, loneliness, divorce, war, violence, abuse, suicide) and of natural devastation (rotting fields and flesh, diseases, accidents, disappearances, sinkholes), the world of *Hollow Ground* surely signifies loss. Yet Moody Myers — who spends his life trying to retrieve, record, and remember the land and history he unwittingly helped to imperil during his days as a mining engineer — finally believes, has to believe that "nothing is never lost." Primordial cataclysms or grand historical moments notwithstanding, an individual's life and death still matter. But Moody — and Taft, too — learn that you can't label and contain "Articles of Human Suffering … each tagged and dated with a yellowed note card" nor can you understand the language of death, "the first language that was ever true and accurate," until you die.

Following a horrific and hilarious county fair near-apocalypse, in which a giant screen drive-in porno movie is the first thing swallowed up by the earth, Tanya says, "I hope this is finally the end of the world" and professes not to care that Taft was almost lost. Concludes Tanya, "I figured if he's gone, he's gone. That's the law of nature." Her companions inquire whether she'd be sad if Taft had died. "It wouldn't mean anything if I was," Tanya responds. But one of her friends disagrees. "Yes it would," she insists.

"Yes it would," echoes Stephen Marion. Even Taft, a half-grown boy, can feel it. "Here, he thought, is what it means to hurt and go on hurting. This is the solid place inside it all. … Now a despair rose in him for absolutely no reason, not because of the cracked bone or the burnt rock or the maker or even the hole in Tanya's heart … but simply and only because it wanted him and he wanted it, an awful, beautiful pain lacing tight in his groin and belly, like going to sleep and coming awake at once."

In a collapsing, corruptible world of natural law and human choice, this — precisely, heartbreakingly, unmistakably — is what it means to be alive. And this, for me, is what a novel should be.

— Gina Herring

Gina Herring teaches and writes about Southern literature. She lives in Williamsburg, Ky., and is a frequent book reviewer for Now & Then.

The Roots of Appalachian Christianity: The Life and Legacy of Elder Shubal Stearns

by Elder John Sparks

University Press of Kentucky
Lexington, Ky. - 2001
$32.50 (hardcover)

In *The Roots of Appalachian Christianity,* Sparks, elder and ordained minister in the United Baptist Church and native of Eastern Kentucky, provides a fascinating and extremely thorough examination of the rise of the Separate Baptists of North Carolina and their continuing influence on the distinctive mountain denominations of Central Appalachia. (It is a fundamentalist sect that believes in predestination.)

Others, particularly Deborah Vansau McCauley in her 1995 book *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History,* have explored the origins of Appalachian Christianity from a more sociological, even anthropological viewpoint, looking at overall cultural trends and influences. In contrast, Sparks has painstakingly sorted through hundreds of letters, pamphlets, and other written accounts of early church leaders and members to provide an excellent historical portrait of the people who developed Appalachian Christianity.

One of the aspects of Appalachian Christianity that makes it so hard to study is the traditional assumption that there was no "father figure" — such as Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Knox, or John Calvin — to follow and analyze. Sparks refutes this and provides very convincing evidence that Shubal Stearns, a New England-born farmer turned Baptist minister, led his family and congregation from Connecticut to the backwoods of North Carolina on a commission from God to win souls on the frontier in the 1750s. Sparks follows Stearns and his family through their persecution by the Established Church in New England through Virginia to North Carolina, where they founded the Sandy Creek Association of Separate Baptists.

He chronicles the rise of the Separate Baptists through the period leading up to the Regulator War (when people in the rural uplands of North Carolina rebelled against corrupt Crown rule) in the decade before the American Revolution and the subsequent breakdown of the Sandy Creek Association. He also documents the spread throughout Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina of Separate Baptist ideas and practices, such as the rhythmic, highly emotional "holy tone" preaching style, sometimes referred to less reverently as the "musical barking" or "suck-and-holler" style, which Sparks believes is a direct influence of Stearns himself. Sparks argues that while McCauley's forces — "Scots-Irish sacramental revivalism" and "camp meeting religion," for example — indirectly influenced Appalachian religion, Stearns was the preacher who actually introduced these practices in the mountains. In the last section of the book, Sparks explores how Stearns' influence spread and is still predominant today in several modern Appalachian denominations or subgroups.

In addition to being well-researched

and written, Sparks' informal style and sense of narrative make the subject come alive. The reader can almost see Stearns, with his small stature and piercing eyes (which his supporters and detractors alike said had almost supernatural powers to bring sinners to the Light) as he travels around the mountains preaching and baptizing converts.

While most books about Appalachian mountain religion are written by outsiders, however sympathetic, *The Roots of Appalachian Christianity* is a first-person account of religion in Appalachia, written by an author steeped in the traditions of the mountains and their inhabitants' beliefs. In the tradition of mountain farmer-preachers, who take no pay for ministering to their flocks, Sparks supports himself and his family with a "regular" job as a lab technician while preaching and writing. Such a first-person account of Appalachian religion by a man who lives the traditions every day is a rare gem and belongs in the collection of every serious student of Appalachian Christianity.

—Mark Bay

Mark Bay is electronic resources, serials, and government documents librarian at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky. He grew up in rural upstate New York and is interested in the history and religion of the Appalachian region.

In Brief

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—Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington is the reviews editor for Now & Then.

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—Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington is the reviews editor for Now & Then.

The Matzoh Ball

by Marilyn Kallet

All the girls were primping, getting ready for the Matzoh Ball, the biggest social event of the season. Fancy dress was required, and each girl wanted to be the lightest, fairest, and fluffiest maiden at the dance. All the dresses were supposed to be cream-colored, ivory, or white. Shoes could be bleached to match, and girls might adorn them with sprays of parsley or celery. Onions were absolutely out of the question, as they would clash with girlish perfumes.

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Marilyn Kallet is the director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she was awarded the 2001 Chancellor's Research and Creative Achievement Award for her books and poetry about the Holocaust. She is the author of eight books, including Sleeping with One Eye Open: Women Writers and the Art of Survival *and* How to Get Heat Without Fire.

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JENNY JONES

Both photographer Jenny Jones, a nurse, and her husband, ETSU professor of photography Mike Smith, have spent years documenting Moss Sanders as she has grown up. The youngster was three when this photo was shot in 1997. Moss looks out over the field in Piney Flats, Tenn., along with the neighbor's dog, Jada.

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